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Irish Voices of Chekhov: Translations and Adaptations of Chekhov by Contemporary
Irish Playwrights

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Introduction

The aim of the present dissertation is to investigate the ways in which certain types of intercultural transfer, i.e. re-workings, retranslations and adaptations of foreign plays as literary texts are achieved in the context of postcolonial, even post-national Ireland. To this aim, I study translations and adaptations of Chekhov's works (the major plays as well as a short story and a vaudeville) made by contemporary Irish playwrights from the 1980s to the present. I am interested in the various ways in which these Irish dramatists re-appropriate Chekhov's work for the Irish stage and the dramatic canon thereby opposing or displacing already existing Standard English translations. My theoretical point of departure is that the translation and adaptation strategies used by the dramatists are not random, accidental or simply reflecting personal preferences, but derive from and are influenced by the context the particular versions have been created in. Exploring the relevant contexts and the underlying ideological assumptions shed light on how Irish theatre culture reflects on itself in our time. Changes in the patterns of translation/adaptation practice show the development in cultural and artistic self-perception. Also, the study of translations/adaptations for the stage can illustrate that the process of rewriting is not a neutral, transparent and exclusively textual practice, but a complex one that can reflect as well as contribute to the transformation of national and cultural identities.

My hypothesis is that the Chekhov translations/adaptations carried out by four Irish playwrights during the last three decades demonstrate a changing pattern, which is largely due to the changes in the socio-cultural/socio-political environment locating the practice of rewriting. The playwrights' translational choices were not wholly made according to personal tastes and preferences, but were significantly influenced by the external conditions under which the translations were produced. In the 1980s

when Brian Friel and Thomas Kilroy embarked on their first Chekhov rewritings they both reacted to and intervened in the process termed “decolonisation” on the cultural level, by virtue of their translations’ and adaptation’s role in resisting the dominance of Standard English and, consequently, in establishing the currency of English as it is spoken in Ireland for the transplantation of modern classics.

The pattern traceable in contemporary Irish playwrights’ rewriting of Chekhov is that in the first phase, during the 1980s and part of the 1990s they produced explicitly Hibernicised works (Brian Friel made free translations of *Three Sisters* [1981] and *Uncle Vanya* [1998], Thomas Kilroy an adaptation of *The Seagull* [1981]) domesticated to a great extent in a way that suggests a certain political agenda underlying their choices: to further the final decolonisation of the Irish mind. Later translations and adaptations, even by the same author, or by members of the younger generation, show a conspicuous change in approach. These works include Friel’s *The Bear* (2001), *The Yalta Game* (2001) and *Afterplay* (2002), Frank McGuinness’ *Uncle Vanya* (1995) and Tom Murphy’s *The Cherry Orchard* (2004). In these reworkings the public project of decolonisation was abandoned and the translation techniques applied testify to either the foregrounding of more private considerations or the privileging of the source culture by way of foreignising the translations. The reason behind this change in approach to rewriting/translation, as I argue, is that the public project of decolonisation has ceased to be the underlying ideological agenda because it has become outdated and irrelevant in an increasingly multicultural, economically as well as politically successful Ireland. The relatively newly gained confidence of the Irish is reflected in theatre as well and it conditions translations where the re-appropriative desire fostering the creation of Hibernicised translations is not so immediate anymore. There is no urgent need to stress the Irishness of the translations

in opposition to the Britishness of earlier ones, and in turn, no motivation to thoroughly acculturate them. Instead, some of the more recent translations of Chekhov moved away from the public-oriented, decolonising project to focus on more intimate, private and aesthetic concerns, and use adaptation and translation strategies that serve such ends. Others are carried out by writers ready to employ techniques of foreignisation, which results in creating a distance from the earlier trend. The foreignising translations signal an opening up to voices that risk sounding somewhat foreign to their Irish audiences, allowing for a more complex cultural dialogue.

The primary material for the analysis consists of the original Russian texts of Chekhov's major plays, a vaudeville, a short story and their translations and adaptations by the above mentioned four Irish playwrights, as well as Friel's quasi-original Chekhovian one-act play, *Afterplay*, which I treat as an extreme form of adaptation. With the exception of McGuinness' *Uncle Vanya*, these texts were all published. My analysis of these translated and adapted works considers them exclusively as literary works and not performance texts or actual theatrical adaptations. Therefore, my discussion includes literary analysis as well, but no consideration is given to the translation/adaptation techniques in terms of their potential theatrical realisation.

In the first chapter of my dissertation I will review the different fields of study the findings of which have relevance to my analysis of contemporary drama translation and adaptation by Irish playwrights. To justify my positioning of the drama texts under discussion in the frame of translation studies despite the fact that none of them is translation proper, I start with outlining the developments in translation studies during the last few decades that have made such a positioning

possible. The shift from a normative approach, prevalent until the emergence of translation studies as an independent discipline, towards the parameters of descriptive translation studies has turned attention to the target texts and has facilitated a re-evaluation of the notions of equivalence and faithfulness acknowledging the translator's creativity. The revaluation of basic issues of translation generated a widening of the definition of translation to include various types of rewriting practices. The cultural turn in translation studies brought about a view of translation not merely as a linguistic exercise but as a textual practice deeply rooted in different social, political and cultural systems. The intention to account for translational choices in terms of their relation to their cultural-political context became an important focus of analysis within postcolonial translation studies, which explores the role of translation in terms of creating, sustaining and dismantling hegemonic structures. An overview of the ideas recently developed in the field of adaptation theory will show how the status of adaptation as an activity central to human creativity has been enhanced in critical thinking.

Chapter Two delineates the background that motivated the emergence of revisiting Chekhov by Irish playwrights in the form of retranslations and adaptations. I consider some of the early Chekhov productions and translations in Britain that largely contributed to the creation of a certain Anglicised image for the Russian writer, which was passed on to the Irish through the intermediary role English culture traditionally played in transmitting translated literature to the country. The Irish reception of Chekhov's plays is also described, together with the early recognition of affinities between the two cultures. I see the Irish translations of Chekhov, especially in the early phase, as a reaction to the Anglicised versions. This reaction can be

accounted for in terms of resistance to cultural dominance within the context of cultural and intellectual decolonisation.

Through a detailed analysis of Kilroy's *The Seagull* (1981), Friel's *Three Sisters* (1981) and *Uncle Vanya* (1998), Chapter Three discusses the way in which the project of cultural decolonisation is reflected in these authors' artistic decisions regarding what types of translation and adaptation techniques to apply in their reworkings of Chekhov. I will show how these writers' decision to Hibernicise the Chekhov plays through various techniques (ranging from introducing Hiberno-English idiom through inserting allusions to Irish reality to carrying out direct translocation of the particular play into Ireland) discloses the underlying agenda of furthering the decolonisation process by enhancing the status of Irish English as a medium for rendering classic literature, and, as a consequence, by creating a more assertive cultural climate.

Chapter Four provides an assessment of the shift that has occurred in terms of the underlying motivations of Chekhov rewritings in Ireland. The adaptation and translation techniques used in the Chekhov versions of McGuinness and Murphy, as well as Friel's recent Chekhov plays indicate a shift away from the public concerns towards less politically oriented rewritings. McGuinness and Murphy have produced Chekhov plays that are foreignised to a certain extent in contrast to earlier translations where the emphasis was on thorough domestication. Friel's last three Chekhov plays, unlike his first two translations, do not display the features of resistant translation. Creating a distance from socio-political issues they become engaged in the representation of personal experience.

The line of development charted above in terms of the agenda underpinning Irish playwrights' Chekhov rewritings suggests that the changing cultural context

generated a change in the type of translations produced. Whereas in and around the 1980s playwrights found a way to actively engage with contemporary issues related to Ireland's extended decolonisation through producing translations, most recently they have moved away from this earlier endeavour. The new Chekhov translations point either into the direction of opening up to foreign influences instead of cultivating an inward-looking attitude, or to a certain distancing from the representation of contemporary Irish reality and the Celtic Tiger period. In the conclusion I will introduce some views on recent Irish drama in the context of the transitory period Ireland has been experiencing due to the major transformations that the economic boom has generated. In this period of change, new visions and new paradigms are being searched for not only in drama, but in Irish society in general.

Chapter One: Theoretical Background

My investigation of contemporary Irish English translations and adaptations of modern Russian classics draws on several fields of study and their intersections. The main frame of reference is provided by translation studies and postcolonial studies, and postcolonial translation study at their meeting point. Linked to these fields is the emerging subfield of adaption theory, the findings of which also inform my discussion. Besides, the theory of drama translation has also provided some useful insights.

Theories of drama translation and translated drama as literature

The present dissertation considers the Irish Chekhov versions as pieces of literature, that is, literary texts and not as performance texts where a potential theatrical realisation would bear relevance to the analysis. However, references are made to certain performances of Chekhov's plays in England and Ireland as the different treatment of the plays had an important role in shaping the image of both the writer and the work, and consequently later translator's approaches.

The fact that drama belongs to two systems, that is the literary one as well as the theatrical one, complicates the outlining of a theory of drama translation, not to mention adaptation. Brigitte Schultze argues convincingly that the relatively small number of works dealing with the theoretical premises and practical aspects of drama translation has to do with the dual nature of drama, that there is a coexistence of "both literary and performance text" (178), therefore drama translation "implies simultaneous transfer into two forms of communication: monomedial literature

(reading) and polymedial theatre (performance)” (178). Susan Bassnett is one of those translation studies scholars who strives to formulate some kind of theoretical approach to drama, (among numerous others, in her article “Ways through the Labyrinth”) but as Schultze claims Bassnett admitted her she “had given up hope of ever gaining access to this labyrinth” (179). Still, some scholars try and connect the two systems in their work, like Sophia Totzeva, who makes an attempt to highlight “the capacity of dramatic texts to generate ‘theatre texts’” (Schultze 179). Most works dealing with drama translation, however, tend to focus on one or the other aspect of the dramatic text, maintaining the long-standing tradition of making a distinction between the play as primarily a literary text and its realisation on stage. Aaltonen, for instance, in her book *Acculturation of the Other*, says that although the playtexts which she has studied are written dramatic texts, she considers them “as elements of the theatrical polysystem” and supports her approach by arguing that in Finland “very few dramatic texts are published in a printed form, and the general public has therefore no automatic access to them as reading material” (22). Furthermore, in Finland, “the playscripts almost without exception are translated with a view to their use on the stage rather than anywhere else” (Aaltonen 22). Aaltonen also mentions the curious case of a new encyclopaedia of Finnish writers, which ignores drama as a literary genre altogether so she concludes that in Finland “drama is [...] not considered literature” (57).

In contrast, the present dissertation discusses the drama texts under consideration as pieces of literature. I argue that this approach is tenable primarily because of the specific cultural position that drama occupies in Ireland. The rather weighty argument for treating the drama texts to be discussed as works of literature, as opposed to theatre performance, is that in the Irish context, the primacy of the

written text over the theatrical one does prevail and the text of a play does function as literature. An indicator of the fact that dramatic texts are seen as independent pieces of literature is that both Irish plays and translations of foreign drama generally become published and are meant to be read. Also, it is unimaginable that an encyclopaedia of Irish literature would fail to include the nation's playwrights and their works, given the central role drama have played in Ireland's quest for cultural and political independence ever since the Irish Literary Revival. It is also a most prolific literary genre within Irish literature. As for a playwright's view on the matter, the prominent Irish dramatist, Thomas Kilroy in a lecture titled "The Literary Tradition of Irish Drama," claims that despite the fractures and discontinuities in drama by Irish-born dramatists from the seventeenth century to the present, one abiding value is "the pre-eminence of the written text above all other aspects of theatre" (8). Further, he observes that the aesthetics of Irish drama as literature was established by Yeats, who said that "the whole interest of our movement is that our little plays try to be literature first, i.e. to be personal, sincere and beautiful, and drama afterwards" (qtd. in "The Literary" 12). As Kilroy sees it, "even today, Irish dramatists still aspire to create literary texts first, with performance coming later" but he also suggests that "such literary aspiration is coming under increasing attack within the contemporary Irish theatre ("The Literary" 8).

Beyond the specific Irish context, a convincing argument for the primacy of the literary aspects of drama is put forward by critics, for instance Schultze, who argue that drama should be considered "a literary text in its own right" (181). Bassnett, in her defence of "drama as literature in the first instance" quotes Jirjy Veltrusky, who "perceives drama as a genre and a dramatic text as one that is written to be read within the conventions of the genre. But the eventual relationship with

performance remains outside its generic boundaries” (Bassnett, “Still Trapped” 99) because, as he points out, not all drama is written to be performed while the performance of non-dramatic texts is just as viable and accepted.

In the present discussion of translated plays the focus of analysis is not on the relation of the translated text to its potential performance, but on the manifold relationship between translation as literature and the cultural context they are created in. Having established the primacy of the literary in the case of the Irish translations and adaptations under discussion, we can move on to look at what studies of literary translation can offer for the exploration of the selected texts.

Translation Studies

None of the texts analysed in the present dissertation could be considered translation proper in the sense that a translator proficient in both the source and the target languages has produced a target language representation of the original text. Brian Friel, similarly to his fellow Irish playwrights creating versions of Chekhov, does not have any knowledge of Russian. However, his *Three Sisters* is explicitly presented as “A translation of the play by Anton Chekhov” on the cover of the printed version, without any acknowledgement of the sources for his “translation” while his *Uncle Vanya* is “A version of the play by Anton Chekhov” and the translator providing the literal translation is acknowledged. The same is true of *Three Plays After: The Yalta Game* is “based on a theme in ‘The Lady with the Lapdog’ by Anton Chekhov,” *The Bear* is “a vaudeville by Anton Chekhov,” which implies its being a close version. *Afterplay* bears no such label, but starts with an “Author’s Note” elaborating on how Friel perceives his role as adaptor. McGuinness’ *Three Sisters* is presented as “a

version,” while the manuscript of his *Uncle Vanya* bears no label. Kilory’s *The Seagull* is a play “after Chekhov,” while Murphy’s *The Cherry Orchard* is “adapted by Tom Murphy.” As this list demonstrates, there seems to be no consistency in the use of the terms the authors themselves apply to describe their work.

All of these rewritings (whether they are labelled translations, versions or adaptations) are based on earlier translations or word-for-word, or so-called “literal,” translations commissioned for the purpose of rewriting. Still, it is translation theory that can be most helpful in discussing these works and reasons for the method are various. In the following I intend to discuss some central issues of translation studies, look at what important earlier assumptions have been challenged in the field, and how such issues are relevant to the analysis of my chosen texts as translations.

First of all, what validates a translation studies perspective is that recent developments in the field allow for a much wider definition of the nature of translation, thus making room for deviant, irregular translations. In my dissertation I am following Gideon Toury’s very broad definition of translation: “a translation will be any target language text which is presented or regarded as such within the target system itself, on whatever grounds” (qtd. in Tymocko, *Translation* 35).

In literary critics’ discussions of the contemporary translations and adaptations of Chekhov by Irish playwrights there is also a prevailing terminological uncertainty. No consensus seems to be achieved whether they should be regarded as “translations,” as the authors and critics often label them, or “adaptations.” Some critics, however, find fault with what they see as incorrectness in the application of the term “translation” to some of these rewritings. Heinz Kosok, for instance, regrets the fact that it “is not uncommon among Irish critics” that they “regard the numerous plays by Continental dramatists that have recently been seen on the Irish stage as

straightforward renderings of the originals” (99), even though it is well known that the dramatists creating these versions do not speak a word of the source language in question and they worked from so-called literal translations produced by professional translators. More often than not, this aspect is ignored, and the target texts tend to be treated as translations in critical writings as well as by the reading public or theatre audience. To mention only a few examples, Eamonn Jordan dedicates a whole chapter titled “Translations” to Frank McGuinness’ rewritings of European plays, Richard York, though he qualifies the term “translation” in Friel’s case, uses it nonetheless, and Fintan O’Toole, too, regularly applies the word even to Friel’s latest rewriting of Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* (2008) (O’Toole, “Friel does more” n. p.).

The definition of translation, Toury notes, varies greatly across cultures and historical periods, and in order to establish the cultural context of the translation process, one should look at what the difference is “between translation, imitation, and adaptation for the specific period” and also whether “intermediate or second-hand translation (is) permitted” (qtd. in Gentzler, *Contemporary* 130). It seems that in the Irish context of translating these categories can merge, or at least their boundaries are blurred, because making a distinction between them is not considered to be important. Second-hand translation is not only permitted, but also tends to be recognised as translation. In this vein, Maria Tymocko analyses certain texts as translation, although she admits others may consider them “more properly as ‘adaptions’ or ‘imitations’” (*Translation* 35). Defending her approach, Tymocko refers to André Lefevere’s use of the term “rewriting,” which he applies “so as to include what are commonly considered both adaptations and translations, moreover, he argues for the importance of considering all translations, not just those that fit our own time-bound concept of what a translation is” (*Translation* 35).

In the present dissertation I opt for the use of the term “translation strategies” and not “adaptation strategies” when discussing Friel’s and McGuinness’s rewritings of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*, as well as Tom Murphy’s *The Cherry Orchard*, although neither of them is translation proper, but rather, second hand translation. Referring to them as translations may appear to be problematic mainly because of the dramatists’ lack of any knowledge of Russian, but also due to the considerable distance in some cases between the source text and the target text. My choice of terminology is justifiable, however, as I use the terms “translation” and “translation strategy” in a wider sense. Obviously, each translation is to some extent an adaptation and vice versa, and the two cannot be conceived as direct opposites since we can hardly pinpoint where translation ends and adaptation begins.

The fact that the linguistic aspects of translation have been overshadowed in recent decades by its cultural aspects brings free or loose translations and adaptation from the periphery closer into the centre of attention and makes room for them within translation discourse. Toury expands the scope of translation studies when giving his broad definition of translation that considers a text a translation if it is regarded as such in the receiving culture, which is precisely the case concerning the works of the selected representatives of the rewriting activity in Ireland. Furthermore, such a treatment of imaginative re-workings of literature corresponds to the developments in contemporary translation studies where there is a fading away of the dividing line between translation proper and adaptation. The phenomenon is implied, for instance, by Michael Cronin’s observation that currently “the translation discourse surrounding contemporary work is explicit in its disavowal of literalness” (182).

An overview of the developments of translation studies which led to its becoming an important part of cultural studies will show why the texts under

consideration, although not translations proper in the traditional sense, can be considered within the context of translation studies. What invites the discussion of the given texts in the framework of translation studies is that several changes in the field have allowed a wider definition of translation making room for deviant, irregular translations and even adaptations.

In the discipline of translation studies research work during the last three decades has pointed towards a cultural turn since the late 80s and early 90s. In the course of this development, the concept of translation as a purely textual, linguistic practice was radically and irreversibly discarded and instead translation started to be discussed with regard to its context, historical, cultural, social and political. As translation theorists Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere argue, “translation, like all (re)writings is never innocent: there is always a context in which the translation takes place, always a history from which a text emerges and into which a text is transposed” (“Introduction” 11). It has been recognised that by virtue of its embeddedness in such contexts, translation has a significant role in constructing cultures and cultural identities. Lefevere argues that translation “can tell us about the self-image of a culture at a given time, and the changes that self-image undergoes” (“Translation: Its Genealogy” 27). The prioritizing of the source text and source culture gave way to the recognition of the needs of receiving cultures and their impact on translation. Translation now is conceived of and analysed as a textual practice rooted in cultural systems. Exploring these cultural systems, or underlying ideological assumptions, and the ways they shaped and informed Irish dramatists’ versions of the Russian works, might shed light on certain changes in the way Irish theatre culture conceives of itself.

What first of all enabled translation studies to take a cultural turn was the advent of the polysystems theory in the 1970s with Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury as the most prominent theorists. It was the first time that the ideological dimensions of translation were given prominence. Polysystems and translation studies scholars “were among the first to expand their methodologies decisively to include not only cultural but also social and political considerations” (Robinson 2). Polysystems theory explored the macropolitics of translation in terms of the cultural and literary systems into which specific texts are transposed. The work of related theorists attacked the dominance of the original and the consequent degradation of translation. The second phase in the development of translation studies saw a move beyond challenging the previous discourses, and was “concerned with tracing patterns of translation activity at given moments in time” (Bassnett, *Comperative* 146) The emergence of the “manipulation school” in the mid 1980s, led by Theo Hermans and followed by André Lefevere, Lawrence Venuti and others, introduced the idea of translation “as a primary manipulative textual strategy” (Bassnett, *Comparative* 145). Their work paved the way towards the third phase, post-structuralist translation studies. The latter is characterised by a growing interdisciplinarity, which is seen, for instance, in philosophers’ (like Jacques Derrida among others), growing interest in translation, and also in the fact that translation studies is a proliferating field, postcolonial translation studies and feminist translation studies being its fast growing subfields.

As part of the cultural turn, a set of deep-rooted, centuries-old assumptions about and attitudes towards translation have been challenged and effectively changed. The first casualty of the attack waged by translator scholars on outdated models and perceptions of translation was the notion of equivalence. (The problem of

equivalence is in fact an overarching one in the history of translation studies, from the beginning right up to post-structural, post-modernist theories.) The unattainable ideal of equivalence which had been seen as the prerequisite for being faithful to the source was shaken when thinking about translation moved beyond the linguistic level. As a result, the mechanical production of translations equivalent to the original is not a desired end anymore, by virtue of its recognised impossibility. Venuti, for instance, argues against the old-fashioned idea of equivalence when he says that

translation is a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation. [...] A foreign text is the site of many different semantic possibilities that are fixed only provisionally in any one translation, on the basis of varying cultural assumptions and interpretative choices, in specific social situations, in different historical periods. Meaning is a plural and contingent relation, not an unchanging unified essence, and therefore a translation cannot be judged according to mathematics-based concepts of semantic equivalence or one-to-one correspondence.

(Invisibility 18)

As the ideal of equivalence was challenged, its definition underwent a change: the central role of the translator's strategic choices started to be appreciated, and now it is accepted that translators "are free to opt for the kind of faithfulness that will ensure, in their opinion, that a given text is received by the target audience in optimal conditions (Lefevere and Bassnett, "Where" 3). Thinking of translation in these terms

helps to put in perspective the often significant dissent of the Irish Chekhov versions from the original texts. By looking at the underlying motivations for the translator's alterations or "infidelities," one can move beyond evaluative criticism and discover the external circumstances influencing translation practice in a given period in Irish culture.

Assumptions about the relationship between source text and its translation, as well as the relationship between author and translator, have changed too. The traditional low status of translation and translator has been challenged and re-evaluated. For many centuries in discussions and evaluations of translations, the source text, the original, was treated as sacrosanct, sacred, and perfect, whereas its translation was more often than not seen as a betrayal, a necessary diminution of it. This view was challenged by the emergence of new thinking in the late twentieth century, alongside the idea of the death of the author, which leads to the death of the original, as well as the Derridean, post-structuralist challenge to the concept of an original and of binary oppositions, like source and target, original and copy, in general. Derrida in his questioning of the concept of an original, "formulated the concept of translation that becomes the original by virtue of its coming into existence after the source" (Bassnett, "The Meek" 22). The general argument today is that demanding faithfulness, old-fashioned fidelity to the original is obsolete in an age when "the concept of definitive text belongs only to religion or fatigue," when "post-structuralist critics showed the fallacy of attempting to single, definitive meanings and readings of texts" (Bassnett, *Comparative* 140). The deconstruction of the original opens up a wider scope of textual practices for translation studies. It allows a widening of the field where not merely translation proper is studied, but many other textual practices that would not fit the traditional category of translation, like

adaptations, versions, imitations, etc., which are now recognised as having the potential of yielding interesting and useful results. As for the Irish rewritings of Chekhov, the labels vary from translation to version and adaptation, but a general characteristic of them all is that the translators' or adaptors' status in their own cultural context is on a par with the author of the original. One obvious reason is that they are accomplished dramatists in their own right, and this fact most probably plays a significant part in how the concepts of authorship and originality have been challenged by the rewritings whose creators often self-consciously share authorship and creativity with the original.

The general acknowledgement of the necessity for anti-essentialist thinking within translation studies, however, does not entail a complete abandonment of hostility to heterogeneity in translation. Perhaps due to the fact that translation scholars and literary scholars have a tendency to mutually ignore each other's fields, it is not surprising that there are literary critics who, in a highly evaluative fashion, discuss, for instance, Friel's *Three Sisters* in terms of betrayal of the sacred original, and measure this particular translation to a non-existent ideal one. David Krause fulminates against "Friel's Ballybeggered version" for its modification of Chekhov's "flawless original text" (634). One of his numerous complaints is that "it is not entirely convincing to hear an old Russian character suddenly assume an Irish voice" (637), the implication of which is that there is no problem as long as the characters assume a Standard English voice of conventional, Anglicised translations that he, for no logical reason, considers transparent and faithful. What he really seems to be objecting to is the fact that Irish English can be regarded as a dialect legitimately used for high literature, which is precisely the motivation behind Friel's translation.

The translator's role is reassessed as being vital in ensuring the continuous, even enhanced, life of the source text. In the various contemporary strands of translation studies the stress is laid on asserting the role of the translator and arguing for its positive nature. Within postcolonial translation studies, for instance, the Brazilian cannibalistic translation theory created by Haraldo and Augusto de Campos in the 1920s, erases the binary opposition between source and target texts, and positions the translator not as an inferior imitator, but a creator of something entirely new by devouring and transforming the source culture. Feminist translation scholars, too, reject the inferiority of translation and translator, as well as the analogies describing translation in terms of masculine and feminine values as defined in a patriarchal society where the source text is the powerful male and the translation is the weak and unfaithful female. Instead of the metaphor of "belles infidels," they draw on Helene Cixous's notion of in-betweenness, the suggestion that feminine writing happens between the two poles of male and female. Therefore we can say that the time of the self-effacing, subservient, inhibited, invisible translator is over. The enhanced role of translation is reflected in the change in the vocabulary used for describing the work: whereas formerly translation was discussed in terms of negativity (it was called secondary, mechanical, subsidiary, derivative, subservient, inferior, a copy, substitute, a slave to the superior original, or its betrayal), more recently the emphasis has been placed on the positive, assertive aspects, with creativity as a central feature.

The change of approach to translation is revealed by the metaphors contemporary translators use to describe their work. The Irish dramatists translating/rewriting Chekhov talk of their engagement with the original text and author in positive and assertive terms. Kilroy sees translation as "a privileged

conversation with the original author” (“Introduction” 13). Friel says that his *Three Sisters* is an “act of love and homage,” and in connection with his *Afterplay* (a play based on two Chekhov characters), he alludes to a kind of shared authorship. He says that the characters are “not mine alone. I am something less than a parent but I know I am something more than a foster-parent. Maybe closer to a god-parent who takes his responsibilities scrupulously” (Friel, *Afterplay* 69). McGuinness points to the strong link between original writing and creating versions when he says that “in doing versions, there is always a selfish element in it, and a necessarily selfish element in it, because that’s where the writing of plays comes from: you have to be sufficiently obsessed with yourself to believe that your interest, and your exercise of that interest, will involve the audience as well. And that’s the link between doing versions of any play, from any era, and new writing” (qtd. in Long, “The Sophoclean” 266).

Parallel with the redefinition of equivalence and fidelity, and the re-appraisal of the role of the translator, there has been a definitive shift away from normative, evaluative analysis towards descriptive studies. From a descriptive point of view, the attempt to formulate universal rules and norms for translations to comply with is seen as impossible, especially given the situational, contextual nature of translation. It is generally excepted now that no translation is produced in a vacuum and no translation is received in a vacuum either. The descriptive approach in translation studies regards texts as elements in larger systems, where systemic constraints decide why texts get translated in a particular way. The most important question is not how faithfully the translation is carried out, but rather, as Lefevere and Bassnett formulate it, “‘what is the function of the (this, not a, any) translation likely to be?’ ‘What type of text needs to be translated?’ ‘Who is the initiator of the/this translation?’” (“Where are we” 3).

Tymocko lists a set of similar questions likely to be raised in descriptive translation studies:

What relationship exists between two cultures at a certain point in time? Has that relationship changed over time and, if so, how has it changed? What is the position of translators in the source and/or receiving culture? What impact did a specific translation have on its receiving culture? What impact did the source and/or receiving cultural context have on the translation methods and products? How did the translation manipulate or shift the source and/or receiving culture, and how did the receiving and/or source culture manipulate the translation: what patterns of translation choices can one discern, or, to put it another way, what norms were adopted in the course of translation? How do those norms intersect with the cultural impact of the translation and with the cultural expectations within which the translation was produced? (“Connecting” 16).

Consequently, translation is seen as always and firmly located in a cultural context. It is recognised as a shaping force not merely in the sphere of literature but in culture in general, a force that contributes significantly to the formation of cultural identities. It is also acknowledged that as such, translation wields significant power.

Studying the politics of translation entails an exploration of how translation activity is influenced by the systems or contexts it is rooted in. Cultural, political, social aspects are taken into consideration in terms of how they exert their influence from the choice of texts that get to be translated to the way translation is carried out.

With regards to the particular texts that become translated, Sirku Aaltonen states that “a foreign text is usually chosen for translation and performance because the receiving system has a need for something that the text has to offer, and its foreignness is manipulated to make its integration into the domestic system possible” (73). Translational choices, including what strategy to apply, are influenced by contemporary norms and conventions, rather than the linguistics of the source text or the intentions of the translator or original author, therefore, attention needs to be directed to regularities or systemic consistencies in the discourse used in translations (Aaltonen 18). In twentieth century Irish theatre, the interest in retranslation, rewriting has focused on the ancient Greek and the modern, especially Russian, plays. They are translated and reworked by contemporary Irish dramatists in a greater number than any other type of drama. The classical Greek tragedies allow an exploration of issues central to the crisis of the Northern Irish state: the consequences of state violence, for instance, or the relationship of the state and the individual, or the debate concerning identity North and South. Tom Paulin’s *The Riot Act* (1984), an adaptation based on Sophocles’s *Antigone*, Brendan Kennelly’s *Antigone* (1985) and Seamus Heaney’s *The Cure at Troy* (1990) are only a few examples among the numerous Irish versions of Greek tragedies. Chekhov’s plays, on the other hand, have been reworked in Ireland to bring out more general analogies between Russian and Irish history and sensitivities. Regarding the Chekhov versions, especially the earlier, Hibernicised ones, one underlying motivation is the attempt to displace of earlier Standard English translations with recognisably Irish English ones, and in this way the great modern Russian classics offer not merely an analogy to the Irish situation, but more importantly, a site of resistance to English cultural dominance and of assertion of Irish culture.

Rachel May in her book on English translations of Russian literary works argues that “translations of Russian literature are not simply stand-ins for their originals. They themselves form a body of literature, subject to its own historical and political constraints, observing its own rules of syntax and communication” (144). The present dissertation takes Irish dramatists’ translations and adaptations of Chekhov as such a body of literature, with changing patterns of reworking practices that are inevitably impacted upon by various social and political constraints.

Postcolonial Translation Theory

In my dissertation I deploy the postcolonial perspective as a necessary approach, in agreement with Tymocko, who states that “in the translation of central cultural documents, a political dimension is the norm in a country that has been conquered or colonized by another country. This is the case in Ireland” (“Politics” 8). The translations/adaptations of Chekhov by contemporary Irish playwrights discussed here can and will be analysed along the lines of the development of the cultural and national identity formation characteristic of nations with a colonial experience. Tymocko describes this development as follows:

Many cultures that are struggling with and emerging from colonization go through three major stages; they move from a colonized stage in which colonial values are introjected, to a stage in which an independent identity begins to emerge but is constrained by opposition to the colonizer’s values, to a third stage of decolonisation in which truly autonomous perspectives can develop. (“Politics” 9)

Analysing the translation and adaptation techniques applied by contemporary playwrights and exploring the socio-cultural and socio-political contexts that influence them can reveal a state of transition between the last two stages of development Tymocko describes. What explains this transitory phase is that although colonisation is long over politically, the overcoming of the psychological legacy of colonialism has been a complex and ongoing process.

My claim is that the Irish representation of foreign classics in the form of retranslation and adaptation bears not only the mechanisms of the process of decolonisation continuing in the late twentieth century, but also the gradual abandoning of this project, as in an increasingly globalised and multicultural world where the significance of borders is diminishing, it may be perceived as completed or irrelevant by playwrights. I agree with Tymocko that “translation in the Irish context [...] is not simply a locus of imperialism, but a site of resistance and nation building as well” (*Translation* 21). Through the analysis of the translations and adaptations to be discussed, I argue that translation as a site of resistance and nation building still has its relevance in the context of the country’s transition from being predominantly rural with a lasting legacy of colonialism into a post-modern, globalized country. Friel’s and Kilroy’s early translations/adaptations made in the 1980s attest to the fact that at that time psychological decolonisation was still not over. However, during the same period, new perspectives, liberated from the earlier decolonising project started to emerge too, as it can be witnessed in the shift characterising the translation strategies of Friel himself in the case of his one-act plays, *The Bear*, *The Yalta Game* and *Afterplay*, as well as Frank McGuinness’ *Uncle Vanya*, and Tom Murphy’s *The Cherry Orchard*.

It seems evident that for the discussion of translation in Ireland, a country with a colonial experience, the postcolonial perspective is indispensable. It is postcolonial translation studies that allow an analysis which points beyond the mere comparative or aesthetic evaluation due to its method of placing translation, as a type of textual practice, within the wider social and cultural forces that inform its creation, and on which translation reflects in turn.

The embeddedness of translation in its socio-political and cultural context is recognised by one of the numerous contemporary Irish translators and adaptors of Greek drama. Colin Teevan, who produced an adaptation of *Iphigenia in Aulis*, observes: “it was only after completing my version that I began to see those broader social forces that I and my text had been subject to, and through this I began to see the relationship of recent translations of Greek tragedies by Irish writers to recent developments and debates in Irish history” (77). He points out that “much of this veritable explosion of new Irish versions of Greek tragedies has much to do with the always topical debate in Ireland, North and South, concerning identity” (Teevan 78).

Having challenged and gone beyond the old, traditional notions regarding translation, the cultural turn in translation theories made the groundwork for postcolonial translation studies. More recent work in the field focuses on issues that have to do with the hidden political nature of translation, that is, the power inherent in translation as a cultural practice. Venuti, among others, describes the conditions that “permit translation to be called a cultural political practice” (*Invisibility* 19) and he calls attention to the ethnocentric violence inherent in the traditional, domesticating modes of translations. Domestication as a method of translation means that in the translation process the original text is acculturated to such a great extent that it becomes perceived not as a translation of a foreign text from a foreign language and

culture but as one that sounds familiar for its new audience in terms of culture-specific elements and fluent in terms of language. Venuti describes

the violence that resides in the very purpose and activity of translation: the reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that preexist it in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality, always determining the production, circulation, and reception of texts. Translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text with a text that will be intelligible to the target-language reader. [...] Whatever difference the translation conveys is now imprinted by the target-language culture, assimilated to its positions of intelligibility, its canons and taboos, its codes and ideologies. The aim of translation is to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar; and this aim always risks a wholesale domestication of the foreign text, often in highly self-conscious projects, where translation serves an appropriation of foreign cultures for domestic agendas, cultural economic, political. (*Invisibility* 18)

The wholesale domestication of the foreign, which is the traditional and dominant approach in British and American culture, has increasingly been seen by postcolonial translation studies scholars, and those who search for an ethic of translation, as having negative implications. The reason is that “by producing the illusion of transparency, a fluent translation masquerades as true semantic

equivalence when it in fact inscribes the foreign text with a partial interpretation, partial to English-language values, reducing if not simply excluding the very difference that translation is called on to convey” (Venuti, *Invisibility* 21). It can also be claimed that apart from imposing Anglo-American values on foreign readers, aggressively domesticating translations take part in the creation of cultures that are adamantly monolingual, unreceptive to and intolerant of the foreign, which they are prevented to have an encounter with by this type of translation. Consequently, domestication in translation “furthers the unequal cultural exchanges between the hegemonic English language nations and their global others” (Venuti, *Invisibility* 20), supporting an attitude of cultural imperialism.

As it will be shown in Chapter Three of this work, the Irish domesticating translations and adaptations by Friel and Kilroy do have their own cultural and political agendas, although not quite what Venuti has in mind. In a wider context of Anglo-American imperialism and its relation to its others, Venuti’s idea, that in opposition to domestication, “foreignizing translation in English can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism” (*Invisibility* 20), is evident. However, there is an interesting twist in this situation when we consider contemporary translations of Chekhov into English by Irish playwrights. Here it is not foreignisation, but precisely domestication that functions as resistance. For Kilroy and Friel, in their earlier rewritings of Chekhov, it was precisely the domesticating method, with its corollary of ethnocentric violence, that was employed to ensure a strong, pointedly Irish stance against the ethnocentric methods of Anglicised British English translations. The Irish English translations served as a means of re-claiming the literature of a foreign culture from the British tradition for their own domestic culture, which, being a strategy of intellectual

decolonisation, is fundamentally a resistant project. However, this agenda linked to cultural nationalism appears to have run its course and in the new century a more cosmopolitan, one might say post-nationalist, outlook is becoming dominant within Irish society. In the sphere of drama translation it is reflected by the shift from domestication towards other modes, most importantly, foreignisation, as exemplified in the more recent translations of Chekhov by Irish playwrights.

It was the above mentioned “cultural turn” in translation studies, with its emphasis not only on cultural but also social and political aspects in the study of translation, which foregrounded the relation of power and translation and thus paved the way for postcolonial translation studies. Postcolonial translation theorists insist “that the study and practice of translation is inevitably an exploration of power relationships within textual practice that reflect power structures within the wider cultural context” (Bassnett, “The Meek” 21). Therefore, the study of translation in relation to empire can yield important insights into the mechanisms of colonial as well as postcolonial cultures and societies.

As translation scholars moved away from discussing translation merely on the premises of literature and linguistics towards a view of translation embedded in cultural systems, postcolonial scholars, too, realised that translation is one potentially hugely important field of their study. It became widely accepted that “colonialism and translation went hand in hand” (Bassnett and Trivedi, *Post-colonial* 3), that is “translation has always been an indispensable channel of imperial conquest and occupation” (Robinson 10). Also, the analogy between the translation process and the creation of colonial hegemony prompted scholars to analyse translation and empire not separately but “translation as empire” (Robinson 10), whereby the subjugated,

colonized other was seen as the translation, the copy of the hegemonic power, the original.

Translation, however, was recognised as having a central role not only in establishing and maintaining domination, but also in resisting imperialist power structures. Postcolonial theorists claim that translation always entails cultural transformation so the questions they seek to answer are “*who is transforming what how? And also: if a current or still-dominant cultural transformation is harmful to our interests, how can we retranslate its terms so as to engineer a different transformation?*” (Robinson 93, emphasis in the original). Thus this field of study is also preoccupied with questions relating to the ways “translation has been used or should be used to resist or redirect colonial or postcolonial power” (Robinson 88).

In our postcolonial, postmodern times, the concept of translation has been widened to describe aspects of the postcolonial condition. Homi K. Bhabha, one of the most prominent theorists of postcolonialism, talks of “the performativity of translation as the staging of cultural difference” (Bhabha 227). His notion of “cultural translation”, however, is far removed from the actual practice of translation involving texts from different cultures, as instead it is applied by him as a metaphor for the condition of hybridity and the process of migrancy that characterise contemporary reality.

As outlined above, postcolonial translation studies examine the various roles of translation ranging from translation being “a channel of colonization, through translation as a lightning-rod for surviving cultural inequalities after the collapse of colonialism, to translation as a channel of decolonisation” (Robinson 6). Corresponding to these different roles of translation, different modes of it are seen as cultural practices that range on a scale from having negative effects (erasing the

dominated culture's values or subjugating the colonized culture, and maintaining this subjugation by appelling it as the "copy" of the original, i.e. the hegemonic culture), to being more positive and constructive as a means to achieve cultural assertion as part of decolonisation. Tymocko, for instance, in her book *Translation in a Postcolonial Context* (1999), shows how the Irish, when translating their own heroic tales into English, managed to find ways to oppose the colonizer's manipulation of their culture, and she goes as far as to claim that the translations in question actually effected significant political changes. She considers translation as "one of the discursive practices that contributed to freeing Ireland from colonialism, a discursive practice that [...] shaped Ireland's resistance to England and led eventually to political action and physical confrontation" (Tymocko, *Translation* 15).

From a postcolonial perspective, which more often than not has the vantage point of the colonized, the different modes of translation seem to have different effects. It is often argued that the traditional domesticating, or assimilating strategies should be looked at with suspicion and should be displaced because they are potentially harmful as they help maintain hegemonic dominance, as well as contribute to the erasure of cultural diversity and lack of tolerance. The idea behind this, as Douglas Robinson puts it, is

that "assimilative or domesticating translation, which used to be called 'sense-for-sense' translation, is a primary tool of empire insofar as it encourages colonial powers (or more generally the 'stronger' or 'hegemonic' cultures) to translate foreign texts into their own terms, thus eradicating cultural differences and creating a buffer zone of assimilated 'sameness' around them. Members of hegemonic cultures

are therefore never exposed to true difference, for they are strategically protected from the disturbing experience of the foreign – protected not only through assimilative translations but also through five-star hotels in third-world countries, and the like... (109)

Lawrence Venuti also warns of the consequences of extreme domestication in translation. He claims that British and American publishing

has reaped the financial benefits of successfully imposing Anglo-American cultural values on a vast foreign readership, while producing cultures in the United Kingdom and the United States that are aggressively monolingual, unreceptive to the foreign, accustomed to fluent translations that invisibly inscribe foreign texts with English-language values and provide readers with the narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in a cultural other. (qtd. in Robinson 33)

To counteract imperial dominance and the erasure of cultural diversity, postcolonial translation theorists call for new modes and ethics of translation, which have the potential to achieve cultural decolonisation and maintain cultural variety. In an opposition to domestication, one of the most favoured modes of translation is neoliteralism, or foreignisation, one of the first advocates of which was Friedrich Schleiermacher. He argued that the best method of translation is when “the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer.” The translator should do this by seeking “to communicate to his reader the same image, [...] he himself has gained [...] of the work as it stands, and therefore to move

the readers to his viewpoint, which is actually foreign to them” (Schleiermacher 42). In other words, the foreignising translation strategy follows the contours of the source text closely, retaining as much of its textual and lexical features as is possible. Translating texts into non-standard, dialectal languages, or choosing marginally placed texts also count as foreignisation strategy. Foreignisation can offer the target audience an exposure to difference, therefore, it prevents an imperialistic, assimilating view of other cultures. To achieve this, foreignisation intends to signal foreignness in order to allow difference to enter the text and thus the recipient culture, achieving, in Venuti’s words, “an ethic of difference” (*Scandals* 82).

André Lefevere argues similarly when he says that Western cultures, instead of translating non-Western cultures “into Western categories to be able to come to an understanding of them” (“Composing the Other” 77), should try and understand non-Western cultures on their own terms. To do so, the use of “analogy,” ultimately domestication, should be abandoned, similarly to the urge to appropriate the foreign culture in the translation process in order to construct a foreign culture in the receiving culture’s own image.

One of the shortcomings of certain postcolonial translation theories is, however, the simplifying binary opposition between Europe and its colonies. Here lies the reason why Ireland, a country having a long colonial experience, but also a radical language shift from the native to the coloniser’s language, does not easily fit into the categories proposed by postcolonial theory on translation. For instance, when assimilative or domesticating translation is attacked by foreignists, scholars invariably mean a translation of the dominated culture into and by the hegemonic one. Foreignisation then is offered as a technique of resistance. In certain cases, however, the projected binary opposition between domestication and foreignization becomes

blurred. The value of domestication is different when the Tagalogs domesticate their Spanish conquerors' hymns, and by doing so they retain some measure of control, or when contemporary Irish playwrights domesticate Russian texts to counteract the domesticated, Anglicised Standard British English translations of the classics imposed on them.

From the perspective of the foreignisation/domestication debate, the texts in the focus of the first part of my dissertation, i.e. the domesticating retranslations/adaptations of Chekhov by contemporary Irish playwrights, constitute a somewhat peculiar case. These translations do not conform to the general pattern described in postcolonial translation as here translation is not an exchange between the dominant and the dominated culture. Postcolonial theories of translation tend to focus on either the dominant culture's manipulation of the representation of the dominated culture through translation, or on translational practices employed by the dominated culture to "write back" to the empire, i.e. to resist such manipulation and create a fairer representation of itself. In the case of the translations/adaptations under discussion there is a three-way relationship. They are rewritings of texts belonging to a culture (Russia) outside the dichotomy of dominant/subordinate carried out by a formerly dominated (Irish) culture's representatives with the distinct aim to displace the dominating (English) culture's own, earlier translation of the Russian texts imposed on the dominated culture. In other words, what we examine here are Irish English translations of Russian classics whose ambition is to create an Irish English canon of those classics in the place of earlier Standard English translations. The domestication, that is, Hibernicisation, of Chekhov, thus serves not the interests of the (former) colonizer, but the former colonized in their struggle for cultural assertion. In this case, it is precisely domestication and not foreignisation that functions as a tool of

decolonisation. The Kenyan writer, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in his work *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986) refers to "the laborious and ongoing process by which the collective mindset or ideology of colonialism is gradually dismantled in both the former imperial centres and colonial peripheries" (qtd. in Robinson 21). Friel and other Irish dramatists consciously enter this discourse when they talk about their role in "decolonising the imagination," especially as their translations are clearly part of this process. Therefore, studying Irish dramatists' translations and adaptations is also a way to explore the representations of power relationships within textual practice, and an exploration of how translation can shape cultural identity.

As the analysis of more recent translations and adaptations of Chekhov, included in the second part of my dissertation, will demonstrate, when the agenda of decolonisation is already felt exhausted or no longer relevant in the context of radical globalization, Irish translators tend to turn away from the explicit domesticating mode and reach for some measure of foreignisation. Thereby they rid themselves of the earlier paradigm of colonized and colonizer, and enter a more immediate dialogue with the literature of the third culture involved, Russia. This is a stage where the applicability of postcolonial theory becomes less relevant, and it is more useful to take into account Ireland's and its writers' engagement with globalisation.

The question why particular texts are chosen for translation in particular cultures, in our case Chekhov's texts for retranslation in Ireland, has also been explored by postcolonial translation theory. It is argued that even on the level of selecting texts for translation, "the relative power and prestige of cultures, with matters of dominance, submission, and resistance [...] are extremely relevant for the selection of texts to be translated" (Lefevere and Bassnett, "Where" 8). Irish playwrights, when choose a classic of high prestige to translate into Irish English as

opposed to Standard English, contribute to the prestige of Irish English as a literary language. Michael Cronin, in his book *Translating Ireland* (1996), draws attention to power issues inherent in translation: “Translation relationships between minority and majority languages are rarely divorced from issues of power and identity” (4). He also points out that “the majority language spoken in Ireland, Hiberno-English, is of course itself in a minority position in the English-speaking world” (4). It is not surprising then that several retranslations of certain Russian texts by Irish playwrights are marked by the dynamic between a minority language (Irish English) and a majority language (Standard English).

In line with the argument above, I try to show that apart from the obvious and arguably strong motivations provided by personal tastes and subjective artistic considerations, there seem to be some other, less conspicuous reasons behind Friel’s and Kilroy’s choice of Chekhov’s works for their Hibernicising translations. If translation functions as an effective means by which former colonies can assert their cultural identity, then re-translating Chekhov, a true classic of world literature, appears as a highly effective choice for the purposes of asserting the prestige of the English language as used in Ireland.

Theory of adaptation

After Lefevere’s use of the term, it seems that “rewriting” could conveniently cover an extremely wide range of textual practices that involve some sort of (re)interpretation, from translation proper to adaptations both within and across cultures. Terms like adaptation and version, as Bassnett claims in 1998, had not been “clearly defined, and are usually used to justify or explain certain strategies that may

involve certain divergence from the source text” (“Still Trapped” 96). Recently, however, adaptation has been given a great deal of scholarly attention. Numerous works have been trying to describe it in greater detail and set up a paradigm for the various forms of textual and cultural practice labelled adaptation. This leads us to take a look at what adaptation theory has to offer for exploring Irish rewritings of Chekhov.

One crucial concern of those who theorise adaptation is its status within creative processes. Similarly to translation, adaptation has been going through a re-evaluation recently. It is recognised that adaptation is central to our contemporary experience of culture, it permeates our lives, and similarly to the change that occurred in thinking about translation, the status of adaptation is undergoing a re-evaluation. But being a highly complex practice with countless manifestations, adaptation seems to defy attempts at creating definitions of and setting up classification for it. A recurring theme in different writings on adaptation seems to be the congeniality of translation and adaptation, their being different manifestations of the same rewriting practice, or the idea that adaptation is often considered as a further reach of translation. In any case, the boundaries between them are blurred, and the contours seem to fade. Translation and adaptation are characterised by similar techniques, motivation and effect, not to mention both practices’ traditional lowly status compared to originals. In relation to adaptation, Julie Sanders claims that “The sheer possibility of testing fidelity in any tangible way is surely also in question. [...] Adaptation studies are, then, not about making polarized value judgements, but about analysing process, ideology, and methodology” (20). Similar ideas and concerns are expressed in various ways concerning the study of translation. Tymoczko says that discarding the normative tendency in theory, “Descriptive translation studies – when

they attend to process, product, and function – set translation practices in *time* and, thus, by extension, in politics, ideology, economics, culture” (*Translation* 25).

Given the obvious overlaps, intersections and analogies between translation and adaptation, the grouping together of different types of rewritings in the present dissertation seems justifiable. Both textual practices constitute forms of rewriting central to human creativity, and are influenced by and reflecting on their social contexts. They share techniques, as well as an inevitable reliance on an original. And, importantly, both are in need of constant re-evaluation in terms of their merit as creative processes.

Although adaptation is present across different media and genres in contemporary culture, drama is one of the genres where it has been practised most conspicuously. The practice of adapting drama is almost as old as the creation of original plays, and Dion Boucicault’s observation that “Plays were not written, only rewritten” (qtd. in Kurdi, “Adaptations” 83) is one way of saying that the history of theatre is a history of adaptation, a widely accepted notion today. In the collection of essays, *The Play out of Context: Transferring Plays from Culture to Culture*, edited by Hanna Scolnicov and Gershon Shaked, translation and adaptation become closely linked when the process of understanding plays from foreign cultures is considered. Shaked claims that any interpretation of literature is one of misunderstanding, a kind of “misunderstanding which is the only way one can understand, because it implies transmission from someone else’s realm of experience to our own” (8). He goes on arguing that when directors try to bring old plays back to life, “they attempt to translate the tradition and the language of the past into the language of culture close to that of the audience attending a play here and now” (Shaked 8), implying that new productions and translations always involve adaptation. The same implication is

discernible in another collection of essays edited by Carole-Anne Upton, *Moving Target: Theatre Translation and Cultural Relocation* (2000). Translation and adaptation of plays are also interlinked in the discussions of the book, whose authors “demonstrate there is no such thing as a ‘literal’ translation” and “that the concept of a literal translation of a play is as absurd as that of an ‘authentic’ production of Shakespeare” (Hale and Upton 11). Theatre has a tendency to privilege the potential target culture over the source culture of the original play, so the role of the translator of plays is not merely decoding but recreating the text for that target audience. This process then inevitably involves some degree of divergence from the original, so the boundary between translation and adaptation seems difficult to set or can even be regarded as irrelevant.

Christopher Innes notes that although reworking plays is not a new phenomenon, “over the last couple of decades the remaking of modern plays has become such a common practice that it almost counts as an identifying mark of contemporary theatre” (248). This is given expression in the fact that the journal *Modern Drama*, dedicated a special issue to adaptation in 2000. Innes in his introduction attempts to provide some kind of a classification for rewritings based on the motives that engendered them. He identifies four categories of rewriting on the basis of the motivation behind the process. The first type of remaking is characterised by a lack of radical revisionism, or critical attack, the motivation being that the material strikes a chord and is interpreted in a new way, resulting in a self-standing work. In other cases, there is radical revisionism involved, in order “to restore original vision of the play when it has become obscured or distorted.” These rewritings, Innes continues, challenge “the canonical (mis)readings of plays that have become national or cultural icons” (249). A similar reason is clearly behind the

numerous Irish rewritings of Chekhov, where the aim is, partly, to correct the stylistic and thematic distortion Chekhov's plays underwent in conventional Standard English translations and productions in Britain. The third, perhaps most common reason for rewriting a play, Innes says, is "to update it and give completely new relevance to the material" (249). There are two extremes: either the source play is deconstructed or treated as pastiche by lifting characters and speeches from a play into another, or classics are transposed to contemporary society while remaining faithful to the tone and emotional life of the characters in the original, effectively creating a new play. The final category Innes mentions is the kind of adaptation that translates classics into a totally different context (for instance, a multicultural one, signalling a global focus). While classifying rewritings on the basis of the various motivations behind their creation signals the central importance of motivation, given the huge variety of adaptations, there are likely to be numerous reworked plays that fail to fit into any of these four categories.

Another type of categorisation is attempted by Heinz Kosok, who distinguishes between dramatic rewritings by Irish playwrights on the basis of their proximity to the source play, and also the extent of acculturation carried out. According to him, the closest to the original is straightforward translation, the next step is linguistic acculturation (he places Friel's *Three Sisters* into this category), which is followed by acculturation as translocation (Kilroy's *The Seagull*), then historical acculturation, and finally appropriation into the translator's own literary canon (McGahern's Tolstoy adaptation, *The Power of Darkness*) (Kosok "Translation" n. p.). Although Kosok notes the impact of the specific target audience's expectations on the extent divergence from the original, he does not focus on it when setting up his categories, the contours of which are far from distinct.

Julie Sanders in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006) deals with these practices across different genres and media. Bearing in mind the inherent intertextuality of literature, she states that adaptation and appropriation are specific manifestations of intertextuality. She enlists several thinkers' and artists' formulation of the same idea, from Edward Said, who remarked that "the writer thinks less of writing originally, and more of rewriting" to Julia Kristeva, who says that any text is a "permutation of texts, an intertextuality" (qtd. in Sanders 1-2). According to Sanders, as two "sub-sections of the over-arching practice of intertextuality," adaptation and appropriation "can vary in how explicitly they state their intertextual purpose" (2). She posits that adaptations "openly declare themselves as an interpretation or re-reading of a canonical precursor" sometimes, but not necessarily, involving directors' personal vision, cultural relocation or some form of updating, movement into a new generic mode or context. In appropriations, however, "the intertextual relationship may be less explicit, more embedded, but what is often inescapable is the fact that a political or ethical commitment shapes a writer's or director's, or performer's decision to re-interpret a source text" (Sanders 2). Resisting this categorisation, however, Kilroy's adaptation of *The Seagull* both openly declares itself as an interpretation and reveals a kind of political, ethical commitment.

Sanders draws attention to the role of adaptation in canon-formation, in its ongoing reformulation and expansion. In my view the Irish reworkings of Chekhov are a case in point as especially in the examples of the 1980s, one aspect of rewriting is to displace the canonised English-language Chekhov and establish an Irish English Chekhov within the Irish theatrical canon. In this way Chekhov is re-appropriated by the Irish theatre after the Russian author had been appropriated by the British theatre. Sanders talks of "the notion of hostile takeover" as present in a term like

appropriation and adaptation, and further she says that “adaptation can even be oppositional, even subversive” (9). In the Irish Chekhov versions of the 1980s, there is an attempt to subvert the established versions of the former hegemony.

My use of the terms “appropriation” and “re-appropriation” as applied to English and Irish translators’ attitudes, differs from that of Sanders. I do not use these terms to describe the actual artistic process as Sanders, but in the sense of a particular nation’s establishing control of or regaining influence over a kind of textual practice like producing translations of foreign classics for their own audiences. Therefore, the terms are used by taking a postcolonial perspective into account.

Arguably, the most comprehensive and ambitious discussion of the process and product of adaptation is in Linda Hutcheon’s book, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006). Similarly to Sanders, she deals with adaptations across all kinds of media and genres, and attempts to answer questions pertaining to every possible aspect of adaptation, which is signalled by the book’s subtitles: What? Who? Why? How? Where? When? Her theoretical premise/starting point is that adaptation permeates human culture, and in our postmodern world “we have even more new materials at our disposal—not only film, television, radio, and the various electronic media, of course, but also theme parks, historical enactments, and virtual reality experiments. The result? Adaptation has run amok” (xi). She defines adaptation as “deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior work” (Hutcheon xiv). In her discussion of adaptation Hutcheon strives to displace the “constant critical denigration of the general phenomenon of adaptation” (xi). She relies on recent translation theory’s achievement with regard to the same issue, that is, the attempt to dispel the old, conventionally negative rhetoric with regard to translation that was seen as derivative, inferior, a betrayal to the source. In her appreciation of adaptation

in its many forms, Hutcheon concludes that “in the workings of the human imagination, adaptation is the norm, not the exception” (177), and she hopes to have proved that “adaptations are derived from, ripped off from, but are not derivative or second-rate” (169).

Some of the key ideas of adaptation theory pertain to the concerns of my dissertation. My analysis of the texts refrains from being evaluative, acknowledging the artistic, creative rights of the rewriter and the importance of the rewritten text’s integrity. Instead of offering value judgements I intended to analyse “process, ideology and methodology” (Sanders 20), in other words, to look at the reworkings of Chekhov by contemporary Irish dramatists in their interaction with the social, political and cultural milieu in which they are produced.

My aim in this study is not to position the various rewritings of Chekhov in any categories, or set up new ones. My concern is with the ways rewritings, whether translations or adaptations, reflect on and communicate with the realities in which they are created. Therefore, my use of terminology does not stand for a new theory: I consider texts as translation when they are relatively close to the original and/or considered as translations in the receiving culture, and I use the term adaptation for the rewritings that involve some significant change (generic or structural) in their treatment of the original, and are widely accepted as adaptations.

Chapter Two: Chekhov on the British Isles: English difficulties, Irish affinities

The observation that Chekhov's plays are misunderstood and misinterpreted by their producers and audiences as well as their translators and critics, has been made regularly since their very first productions up to the present, and not only abroad, but also in his home country. Oleg Yefremov comments that "Chekhov himself was "to blame" for the disastrous reception of *The Seagull*: how was his Russian audience to know of the upheaval that had occurred in him? They knew him still as the author of humorous stories and vaudevilles" (131). More importantly perhaps, Chekhov's work introduced a path in drama so untrodden that it laid countless traps for those who followed him there, let them be directors, actors or translators. His innovations, idiosyncratic and original vision "exasperated old men of letters" (qtd. in Senelick 35) in Russia, and placed wholly new demands on theatre people and audiences. Chekhov himself was constantly expressing deep discontent with the stage interpreters of his drama, famously so even with Stanislavsky whose method, despite Chekhov's pronounced reservations about it, for decades became the model of what Chekhov performances should be like. If he distrusted the directors and actors producing his plays, he distrusted translations even more. Hanna Scolnicov reminds us that "Chekhov did not believe that non-Russian audiences could possibly understand the full meaning of the selling of the estate in *The Cherry Orchard*. So worried was he about his plays being misunderstood in foreign tongues, that he regretted not being able to prevent their translation and production abroad" (1). Chekhov's extremely hostile attitude to translation, of course, did not resonate with translators who have been striving to bridge the gap created by cultural differences ever since the Russian playwright's emergence on the international theatrical scene. His works became more

or less successfully integrated into other nations' literary canons, and in the process they inevitably became moulded to differing extents by the needs of the receiving culture to discover and create their own Chekhov.

"There is a view abroad that the Irish have a particular affinity with Chekhov's work" Thomas Kilroy says in the programme note for McGuinness' *Uncle Vanya*, 1995. Indeed, Chekhov seems to be the classic most widely adapted by contemporary Irish playwrights, as well as one of the most often staged ones in Irish theatres. Within a wider tradition of rewriting and retranslating European classics by Irish dramatists, there is a relatively recent and distinct trend of reworking Chekhov's plays, and a number of the most prominent figures of contemporary Irish playwriting have a Chekhov adaptation or two to their names. Brian Friel re-translated two of the major plays, *Three Sisters* (1981) and *Uncle Vanya* (1998), and adapted a minor one, *The Bear* (2001). He also carried out an adaptation between genres: turned a Chekhov short story, *Lady with the Lapdog* (1899), into a one act play, *The Yalta Game* (2001), and as the latest evidence of his life-long preoccupation with the Russian master, he produced a quasi-original play, *Afterplay* (2002), which might as well be considered an adaptation carried to the extreme, as he borrowed characters from *Uncle Vanya* and *Three Sisters*. It is not only Friel, sometimes labelled as "the Irish Chekhov," however, who is drawn to the Russian master's works. Thomas Kilroy's *The Seagull* (1981) is a transposition of the play into an Irish setting, resulting in an effectively Hibernicised adaptation. Frank McGuinness is a prolific translator and adaptor of European classics, and among his numerous "translations" of Ibsen, Lorca and other European playwrights, there are two Chekhov re-workings too, *Three Sisters* (1990) and *Uncle Vanya* (1995). To close the line, Tom Murphy produced a version of *The Cherry Orchard* in 2004.

Significantly, although not surprisingly, these playwrights' involvement with Chekhov does not stop with adapting his work. His influence is clearly felt in their original drama as well: in the later 1970s, Brian Friel's plays are particularly indebted to Chekhov, most notably *Living Quarters* (1977) and *Aristocrats* (1979) with the three sisters and Chekhovian themes in both, similarly to *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), a "sororal play," to use Scott Boltwood's term, dealing with frustrated lives of the Mundy sisters in rural Ireland. Friel's latest play, *The Home Place* (2005), is another one which evokes Chekhovian associations in its portrayal of the decline of the old land-owning class. Discussing Friel's relation to Chekhov, Robert Tracy comments that the Russian dramatic precursor functions for him "not as a source, nor an influence, but as a kind of presence" ("The Russian Connection" 77). As Eamonn Jordan observes in connection with McGuinness, *The Bread Man* (1990)) is his "most Chekhovian play to date, as McGuinness allows the subtlety, technique, language, focus and the spirit of Chekhov to inform his play" (Jordan 112). In *The Bread Man*, images like fire, the sense of the sea, the dance or the broken china symbolising "the frailty of [the characters'] world" (111) and themes like the threat of dispossession, love as a burden, the need for work all find their equivalence in *Three Sisters*, a translation of which McGuinness worked on around the time of writing his own play. Also, there are Chekhovian resonances in Tom Murphy's *The House* (2000), which is laced with echoes from *The Cherry Orchard*. The question arises why this fervent interest in and intense preoccupation with Chekhov on the part of Irish writers?

Virginia Woolf, one of the earliest critics of Russian writers, when analysing the spirit of Russia and her literature, attempted to account for what she saw as the inability of the English despite all their enthusiasm to understand Russian literature,

especially Chekhov. She believed that it was due to the difference between the two civilisations, namely, that their civilisation bred into the English “the instinct to enjoy and fight rather than suffer and understand” (633), suffering and understanding used to sum up the features of the Russian psyche. Following her train of thought, one starts to ponder whether the Irish, having to deal with the legacy of colonisation, seem to have more in common with the Russian character implied above, which might count as a partial explanation for the huge popularity of Chekhov among contemporary Irish dramatists.

This chapter takes a closer look at what is behind the generalising idea of English difficulties and Irish affinities regarding Chekhov’s works, in the context of the first translations of his plays and their reception in the two countries. As there was no direct route for Chekhov to take from Russia to Ireland, but instead, British English language and culture played an intermediary role, it is necessary to consider the nature of those Standard English translations and productions that introduced Chekhov’s works to Irish audiences, and whose presence in the Irish literary culture provoked Irish dramatists to challenge them. Examining those early and later productions and translations in which Chekhov became canonized in Britain to the extent of becoming an honorary Englishman, will explain why the Irish may regard the English Chekhov they originally had access to in serious need of being de-Anglicised. Such an examination will also shed light on the motivation behind the Irish preoccupation with reworking (retranslating, adapting, creating versions of) his work. It will be shown that this idiosyncratic Irish take on Chekhov, that is, the intention to re-appropriate, Hibernicise his work, is supported by the social, cultural, historical similarities between the two nations that the Irish writers were keen to discover and exploit in their pursuit of a cultural decolonisation. Also, it will be

discussed, how, in a culture traditionally so dependent on translation, it is a natural phenomenon/reaction that such retranslations and adaptations are created, as translation is a site of nation-building and of resistance to the dominance of a foreign culture, as long as it is perceived as still present and influential. Rewriting Chekhov in the Irish context amounts to rewriting the past embodied in the Standard English Chekhov available earlier. However, it is also important to see how the unceasing Irish attraction to Chekhov produces different, less politically charged retranslations, once the formerly colonised society has reached the stage of greater self-confidence in terms of economy and culture.

Chekhov in Britain and in British English

It is often noted that before the Great War, English audiences found not much affinity with Chekhov, denounced his plays as outlandish, incomprehensible, and only the experiences of war and its aftermath facilitated a change: they started to appreciate the plays as they nostalgically saw in them a representation of the loss of their old certainties. Chekhov gradually became embraced by British readers, audiences and critics, so much so that he became canonised in British literature and stands second only to Shakespeare in popularity. However, the cultural transfer that is unavoidably involved in this process left a mark on what became of Chekhov in the English language. Both his image as a writer and his plays underwent serious alterations in the hands of dramatists and critics, and, obviously, translators, and it is generally claimed that the English created an English Chekhov with all the corollary effects of the process. This Anglicised Chekhov has come under attack from all corners.

One of those who first took interest in Chekhov's plays in England was an Irishman, G. B. Shaw. "Shaw professed himself to be a 'fervent admirer' of Chekhov's plays, and as early as 1905 he wrote to the Russian-enthusiast Laurence Irving asking if he 'had any of them translated for the Stage Society', and was the driving force behind the Stage Society's 1911 production of *The Cherry Orchard* in Constance Garnett's translation" (Obraztsova 43). Shaw then became the first Irish dramatist to produce a Chekhov-like play, *Heartbreak House – Fantasia in the Russian manner*, as the subtitle explains.

The first translator of Chekhov in Britain was also a committed "Chekhovian." The text for the very first British production of Chekhov in 1909, *The Seagull*, staged by Glasgow Repertory Theatre was translated by George Calderon,

who “spent two years (1895-97) in Russia learning the language, immersing himself in the literature” (Senelick 131), and was eager to introduce Russian drama to the English public. The production met with moderate success on the part of the critics, and what success it had was probably due to Calderon’s enlightening preliminary lecture on Chekhov’s method.

Despite the enthusiasm and knowledgeableness of those who first discovered Chekhov and intended to introduce him to Britain, his works did not meet with an equally enthusiastic and perceptive reception. The gap between the two cultures as well as theatre traditions proved too hard to be bridged by translation. English reviewers and audiences were accustomed to a developing plot and a social message in the problem play, so they were baffled by Chekhov’s characters, who talked endlessly but always failed to listen, and displayed hardly any action. Also, in the London productions the traditional acting styles were applied to the new, modern theatrical genre Chekhov aimed at: the nineteenth-century star system did not do much good to plays whose prerequisite would have been to achieve the then unthinkable ensemble playing coordinated by the director, whose importance was to replace that of the leading role stars.

One critic in his complaints puts the blame on the acting when criticising *The Cherry Orchard*, staged at the Aldwych in 1911, as an indigestible play: “Russians are foreigners, but, even so, it is highly improbable that they are such fools as they seem in the English version of Chekhov’s comedy” (Senelick 133). Virginia Woolf held a similar view. In her review of the production of *The Cherry Orchard* by the Art Theatre, she also blames the traditional acting style for distorting the play: “the only question is whether the same methods are as applicable to *The Cherry Orchard* as they are to *The School for Scandal*” (Woolf, “Review” 446).

English audiences encountered “authentic” Russian drama even before Theodore Komisarjevsky’s influential appearance as the definitive interpreter of Chekhov, in the productions of Lidiya Yavorskaya, who arrived with a Russian company in London in 1909. But as Aleksey Bartoshevich points out, it is highly ironical that “the English public’s acquaintance with the Russian stage began not with Chekhov in a Moscow Arts production, but with the actress who was the prototype of the *cabotine* Arkadina in *The Seagull*” (25). However, only when Komisarjevsky directed Chekhov’s plays in the 1920s, did Chekhov become recognised as a major playwright in Britain. What helped Komisarjevsky to gain popularity for Chekhov was not that he moved his audience closer to the plays, but the other way round, he moved the plays to the audience as he unscrupulously adapted the plays to British tastes, that is, British tastes as he saw them. He introduced a huge amount of sentimentality by romanticising the characters and stressing the love interest, added a good deal of stage business to make them seem more energetically British, cut references to the Russian context and erased its social significance. In his direction *Three Sisters* became “simplified, romanticised, sentimentalised, and Anglicised” (Tracy 70). What makes Komisarjevsky’s productions worthy of mention even in an analysis of translations of Chekhov’s work is that his enormous influence as an authentic interpreter of the Russian author must have justified the typically British take, both by directors and translators, on the works, established during the Chekhov craze. A comment on the Chekhov cult in England is also relevant to the author’s English translators’ attitude: “The majority, failing to appreciate the fundamental realism and sanity of Chekhov’s vision and purpose handed themselves over to a cult which they had created more in their own likeness than in that of Chekhov himself” (qtd. in May 36).

Komisarjevsky's mission to popularise Chekhov was most likely assisted by the change in the British social milieu after the First World War, when the mood of futility and helplessness became familiar to the British and they saw an expression of a familiar malaise in Chekhov's works. As Senelick puts it, "the mood of embittered disillusion that permeated English society in the wake of the Great War's futile devastation suddenly made the yearnings and futility of Chekhov's people seem more apposite" (140). The motivation behind the fact that the experiences of World War II further strengthened British audiences' sympathy towards and interest in Chekhov's lost people is deplored by some critics. Ronald Bryden argues that if Chekhov was taken to the heart of London audiences, it all happened for the wrong reason. He sees the British take on *The Cherry Orchard*

as a shameless invitation to the British middle-class audiences [...] to think of and weep for themselves as evicted aristocrats robbed of their inheritance. They treated the play as a silvery-grey elegy for the world that had ended in 1914, and they made it almost indistinguishable from contemporary British plays such as N. C. Hunter's *Waters of the Moon*, which flattered the British bourgeoisie's sense of itself as victims of revolution and history. (Bryden 303)

This view is shared by many critics. Cynthia Marsh comments that "the British had also invested these characters with the nostalgia they had for their own gentry and comfortable 'English' country life. From these attitudes had derived the prominently sentimental British view of Chekhov" (121). Kenneth Tynan writes: "We have

remade Chekhov's last play in our image just as drastically as the Germans have remade *Hamlet* in theirs. Our *Cherry Orchard* is a pathetic symphony, to be played in a mood of elegy. We invest it with a nostalgia for the past which, though it runs right through our culture, is alien to Chekhov's. His people are country gentry; we make them into decadent aristocrats" (qtd. in Senelick 305). This view influenced later translators who in turn further strengthened it.

Anglicised, Genteel Translations of Chekhov

The interpretation of foreign works in the receiving culture, whether we consider their readers or producers in the case of plays, depends largely on the translation because it is inevitable that the text's first interpreter for its readers is the translator, and for the foreign reader a text is represented solely by its translator. Chekhov's works have been rendered into English by numerous translators with differing success and popularity, but probably the most influential translator in terms of creating "the Chekhovian image" for the English-speaking world, was Constance Garnett. She was one of the earliest English translators of Chekhov and many other nineteenth-century Russian writers and although she is justly credited with making a huge number of Russian works available for English-language readers, her translations established the phenomenon called "British Chekhov," a heavily Anglicised and thus rather distorted image of the Russian author.

The fact that Garnett's translations are still being reprinted is lamentable, since they have been criticised for being seriously outdated and stylistically weak. Although her work received high acclaim, for instance from Joseph Conrad and D. H. Lawrence, both ignorant of the Russian language, it was severely criticised by

prominent Russian natives and authors like Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Brodsky. Brodsky notably criticized Garnett for blurring the distinctive authorial voices of different Russian authors: “The reason English-speaking readers can barely tell the difference between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky is that they aren’t reading the prose of either one. They’re reading Constance Garnett” (qtd. in Remnick n. p.).

One of the many critical points made about Garnett’s translations is that they are so much rooted in their times and her class’s linguistic style that Chekhov’s Russia becomes “Bloomsburyland.” Frank Beardow provides a lengthy list of debatable phrases found in her 1923 translation of *Three Sister*. He points to the “sprinkling of *my dears*; *(my) dear boy*; *fellow*; *my good man*; *splendid fellows*; *old chap*; *good sort*; *queer* and additionally the use of *gay* to mean *happy*. Moreover; it has examples of dated school slang: *Don’t blubber!* *Honour Bright!* and examples of British social etiquette/class: *mamma*; *pray do!*” (92). On the whole, Garnett’s practice of smoothing over language, adding a veneer of respectability, forced Chekhov’s texts into the mould of Victorian prudishness. As Korney Chukovsky observed it was a “matter of turning the Russians’ volcanoes” into “a smooth lawn mowed in the English manner” (qtd. in May 40). Garnett’s translations set the trend for imposing the British class system on Chekhov’s world, which resulted in a thorough alteration of the originals’ social and political contexts. As for general meaning, her translation strategies, including a tendency to opt for verbatim translations of idiomatic language, and to skip and omit any phrase she did not understand, gave rise to serious distortions too. The incongruity of Russian characters using genteel upper-middle class English and Bloomsburyisms while acting in a manner strikingly alien to English audiences must have had a rather puzzling effect when seen on the stage.

Later English translations of Chekhov were more concerned with the potential production of the plays or were particularly commissioned to be produced as stage versions. As a rule, they tended to be somewhat freer, and produced by translators more knowledgeable as regards Russian culture and, indeed, language. To mention only the most outstanding ones, David Magarshack a Latvian-born translator and biographer of Russian authors, Ronald Hingley a Russian scholar, and Michael Frayn, himself a playwright, all of whom took the trouble to learn Russian. Still, they have also been criticised for being too British in tone. Richard Peace examines some of the most highly acclaimed translations of *The Seagull*, and shows how, even in the ones made by the above listed professionals, there seems to be a tendency to “smooth out language” and neutralise it in pursuit of “good style” (“Chekhov into English” 222). The result is often a weakening of the impact of Chekhov’s irony, the blurring of the strong presence of symbolism, the loss of eccentricities as the hallmark of certain characters.

Reactions to Genteel Translations in England

As Chekhov became canonised and assimilated into British culture and also as Chekhov scholarship matured and highlighted many new aspects that helped the interpretation of the plays, the last few decades of the twentieth century saw various reactions to such “established,” but problematic translations (as well as productions). Most of the translations became seen as having been too strongly Anglicised, ignoring and thus omitting the cultural and political specificity of the plays, and creating stereotypes of a melancholic, nostalgic, psychologising Chekhov surrounded by gentle pathos. There were corrective attempts aimed at a new kind of realism to bring

out the sense of the plays, thus newer translations tended to be more politically engaged and more deeply concerned with language. Many of those producers who wanted to revitalise Chekhov felt it necessary to base their endeavour on new translations or at least updated versions with an emphasis on stylistic modernisation. Jonathan Miller, one of those who created innovative productions, directed *The Seagull*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*, and in each case, he says, he "reacted against the genteel approach, trying to make the work much coarser and more comic" (137). About directing *The Seagull* (1973) he says that he was "concerned to reflect emotion accurately on stage" (qtd. in Senelick 309) and one of his methods to achieve a new kind of naturalism was to focus on the play's language applying to it Grice's rules of conversation he was interested in at the time. Miller employed the "rules of turn-taking" when giving directions on how the speeches should be delivered by the actors. In accordance with this, the dialogue became intentionally more slipshod, and the features of ordinary conversation, like hesitation, interruption, reduplication, overlaps and pauses were introduced, "dialogue overlapped, and characters broke up their talk with umms and errs added by the director" (Senelick 309). In Miller's view, this produced, instead of the usual stale dialogue ignoring the rhythm of ordinary speech, an enhancement of "the sense of being in the presence of reality" [...] "a glittering sense of social reality" (Miller 140).

Mike Alfreds presents another example of showing an idiosyncratic approach to Chekhov's plays and their language: staging *The Seagull* (1981) he, too, tries to avoid producing a distinctively English Chekhov. As David Allen notes, Alfreds argues that it is important to try "to replace our Anglo-Saxon mode of emotional expression by a more extrovert, Slavic one" ("Performing" 191). In his attempt to

avoid Anglicisation, Alfreds was “unafraid of having lines sound foreign and stilted” (Senelick 314).

Trevor Griffiths took the opposite approach to Alfreds’ regarding language when he producing his own admittedly Anglicised new “translation” of *The Cherry Orchard* in 1977. One of his central concerns was to modernise the stale, neutral language of earlier translations. His version is a purposefully Anglicised one, but one that intends to replace the falseness, ornateness and floweriness of earlier texts. Acknowledging the problems arising from the cultural differences in expressing emotion, he strives to convey the emotionality of Chekhov by “tightening the language” so that English audiences can identify with it, unlike with the dated, archaic, sentimental language that would be “beyond the range of the English sensibility” (Allen, “The Cherry” 162). Griffiths’ other central concern to foreground the political meanings of the play made it rather controversial. Challenging half a century of politically neutral British Chekhov distorted by earlier translations that served the idea that Chekhov’s play is “an elegy for the decline of civilisation” (qtd. in Allen, “The Cherry” 156), Griffiths’ intention was to bring out the play’s social and historical significance and while doing so allow “contemporary meanings to emerge” (Allen, “The Cherry” 166). Vera “praises Griffiths’ version for clarifying the context and exploring ideas as a result of which “many of the social, philosophical and political ideas of the play suddenly came into sharper focus” (“The dwindling” 154) and suggests that it is a valuable and welcome act of replacing politically retrograde traditional readings of Chekhov.

Chekhov in Ireland and in Irish English

The presence of the political streak in Irish re-workings of Chekhov's plays is an inevitable one, given the colonial legacy informing the creation of the versions. The idea that due to their particular history, the history of colonisation, the Irish have more affinity with the Russian's "suffering and understanding" than the English, though perhaps a summary observation, is supported by various commentators of Chekhov as well as the Irish dramatists adapting Chekhov's works.

Already at the time of the first productions of Chekhov's plays in London, one English reviewer noted that "the essential futility of Tchekov's characters is precisely that of which Larry Doyle complained in *John Bull's Other Island*, a play written half a dozen years before Tchekov was heard of in these longitudes" (qtd. in Senelick 135). Maybe this illustrates partly why the Irish audience seemed to be quicker to take to the Russian plays. After an initial lack of positive reviews in 1915, the revival of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* by the Irish Theatre Company in 1917 brought success, perhaps due to the already established familiarity with the play. Reviewers in Ireland started to notice the parallel between Russia and Ireland too: the *Freeman's Journal* opined that Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* is "peculiarly interesting for the comparisons it offers between Irish and Russian character" (Senelick 137). *The Irishman* called the play a masterpiece arguing that "there is a marvellous atmosphere, to use the trite phrase, about the play. It shows little action, and gains from the failure, for the mission of the author was to show wasted lives, capable of great effort, but choked by a system which restrains mental activity as effectively as it hampers civil liberty" (qtd. in Senelick 137). This was probably felt all the more so acutely by Irish audiences who had just witnessed the cruel suppression of the Easter Rising.

Irish dramatists rewriting Chekhov in the late twentieth century also explained their attraction to the Russians in terms of discovering similarities. Brian Friel talks of the attraction Chekhov's figures held for him making the remark that they are not unlike members of his own generation in Ireland, behaving "as if their old certainties were as sustaining as ever -- even though they know in their hearts that their society is melt-down and the future has neither a welcome nor even an accommodation for them. Maybe a bit like people of my own generation in Ireland today ... Or maybe they attract me because they seem to expect that their problems will disappear if they talk about them -- endlessly" (Friel, "Seven Notes" 179). Thomas Kilroy, when adapting *The Seagull*, also saw a parallel leaping out at him between the two cultures and histories, and also psychologies:

there are the ingredients of the plays themselves which Irish audiences can respond to with recognition. A provincial culture rooted in land ownership. A familial structure that is so elastic that it can hold all sorts of strays and visitors and drop-ins in painful intimacy. All that talkativeness, tea-drinking and dreaming, above all that dreaming, "the torturing, hear-scalding, never satisfying dreaming" as Shaw put it of his fellow-countrymen in *John Bull's Other Island*. Chekhov's dreamers are immediately accessible to Irish audiences in all their illusions, none more so than Sonya dreaming of angels, as contrastingly, Vanya weeps at the end of (the) play (Kilroy, "Programme note" n. p.).

In turn, Frank McGuinness, in his essay on Kilroy's *The Seagull*, also notes that there are specific comparisons between Russia and Ireland which derive

from the fact that both societies were "verging on radical change at the turn of the nineteenth century ("Adaptation" 3).

Parallels between the two nations' history and spirit as perceived by the writers themselves were commented on by critics, translators and historians as well. Elisaveta Fen in her "Introduction" to the Penguin edition of Chekhov's plays writes of the mood of "disappointment and depression" in the Russia of 1880-1900. Politically, Fen says, the country was "passing through a phase of reaction and retrenchment." Economically, Russia at this time was "undergoing a process of partial proletarianisation as her impoverished peasants were being driven off the land into newly opened factories" (qtd. in Andrews 183). As Mária Kurdi notes in her discussion of Friel's adaptations of Turgenev, "in both countries a feudal-provincial culture with the landowners' big houses as centres ruled the scene well into modern times. To an extent, the spiritual life of both nations developed an indulgence to dreams and illusions, and a tendency to blend the comic with the tragic" ("Adaptations" 84).

Furthermore, it is not merely nineteenth-century Ireland that is seen to have parallels with Chekhov's time and the world of the plays: curious analogies between Chekhov's Russia and twentieth-century Ireland are also noticed by critics who explain the Irish attraction to Russia. Robert Tracy argues for both sets of similarities that may account for the affinity felt for Chekhov by the Irish from Shaw to Friel and beyond:

Shaw's upbringing allowed him to see how Irish Chekhov's un-English world was. The condition of Ireland after Parnell, with no apparent chance for political change, resembled that of pre-

revolutionary Russia. The paralysis Joyce depicts in *Dubliners* echoes the stasis in which Vanya and Sonya, Astrov and the three Prozorov sisters live, while the situation in *The Cherry Orchard*—gentry unable to keep the estate they lose to Lopakhin, the gombeen man – is recognizably Irish. (“Chekhov in Ireland” n.p.)

As for twentieth-century analogies, discussing Brian Friel’s Chekhovian works Tracy says: “Chekhov wrote in a misruled society that he sensed would dissolve. Ireland, north and south, has for most of Friel’s career been preoccupied with the consequences of misrule in Northern Ireland: language as shibboleth, non-communication, uneasy and conflicting memories of the past“ (“The Russian Connection” 77). Elmer Andrews lists similar reasons for Friel’s strong attraction to Chekhov’s drama. He says that late nineteenth-century

Russian disenchantment and frustration have their easily recognisable counterparts in the Ireland of the 1970s and 1980s. The continuing Troubles enforced a sense of impasse and endless malaise, a feeling of stagnation and depression. (...) Politically, no progress seemed to be possible and the resulting vacuum was filled by teh terrorists. In Ireland as a whole, the ongoing process of modernisation was attended by the usual traumas of dislocation and the break-up of traditional values. (183)

All the above parallels not only provide an explanation for the huge attraction that Chekhov’s plays held for Irish writers, but also suggests that Irish playwrights

must have had a sense of justification for their “mucking about Chekhov” (as Senelick disparagingly comments on the “fashion” of making free versions of classics in 1970s’ England). To put it in more positive and less judgemental terms, the parallels can serve as justification for Irish playwrights’ efforts to re-appropriate Chekhov from the British culture by means of creating free translations and adaptations. In these terms, the new versions, despite all the alterations and changes, are likely to restore much that has been lost in Standard English translations let it be the poetry, the politics or the philosophy of the plays, or irony and humour, that Chekhov used to portray what he called the “sad comicality” of everyday life.

Despite the similarities between Russian and Ireland perceived from early on by individual observers and critics, the very first productions of Chekhov’s plays in the early twentieth century were not too favourably received by Irish audiences. Edward Martyn along with Thomas MacDonagh and Joseph Plunkett, staged *Swan Song* and then *Uncle Vanya*, both in 1915 and “although the Dublin reviewers were not nearly as hostile as the English, they still found the works long-winded and dull” (qtd. in Younger 291). Tracy also remarks that “though the Dublin reviewers described Chekhov as wordy and sombre, they were markedly less hostile than those who ridiculed the first London productions of Chekhov in 1911-14” (“Chekhov in Ireland” n. p.). The enthusiasm of those who first staged Chekhov’s work did not diminish however, and the Russian playwright’s influence on the Irish had started.

The contemporary trend of adapting and Hibernicising Chekhov has a couple of interesting early twentieth -century precursors in Ireland. Already in 1918, three years after the first Chekhov play was staged in Ireland, the brother of Thomas MacDonagh, John MacDonagh, wrote a play titled *Weeds*, which was clearly patterned on *The Cherry Orchard*. *Weeds* is set in the West of Ireland, and although

the script is lost, “reviews indicate that the protagonist inherits an estate and resolves to make friends with his tenants. The tenants waiting to take over the estate are the weeds of the title” (Tracy, “Chekhov in Ireland” n.p.).

Another, and for our purposes here, even more interesting, early Irish encounter with Chekhov’s work was the staging of *The Proposal* by the Abbey Theatre. In 1925 the Abbey, abandoning their long-time reluctance to stage non-Irish plays, chose Chekhov’s one-act play, *The Proposal*. Although Constance Garnett’s 1923 translation was used for the script, according to Kelly Younger, it underwent significant changes: the British English, Anglicised text of the translation of the vaudeville was confidently turned into an Irish farce using a dialect distinctively Hiberno-English. Most of the Russian realia, or culture-specific elements, were omitted, the characters’ Russian names were altered to sound more familiar, Russian place names were changed: Marushkin, for instance, became the Dublin suburb Ballsbridge, the charred swamp “the bog,” the term “peasant” being a slur in Ireland, was changed to “tenant,” and instead of the serf emancipation there was a talk of the Irish Land Act (Younger 293-94). In the wake of establishing the Free State, the refusal to endure more of the cultural dominance of Britain is clear.

As discussed earlier, it was not until the twentieth century, however, that the insistence on the similarities between the two cultures was put forward more emphatically. Writers, who were enabled to see the parallels more clearly in hindsight, and who also, in their attempts to deal with the legacy of colonialism, tended to discover for themselves in Chekhov’s work a field of contest between British English and Hiberno-English languages and cultures in the process of cultural decolonisation. Consequently, there is a great deal more behind the Irish preoccupation with reworking Chekhov (among numerous other classics), than the already mentioned,

supposed affinity, at best vaguely and subjectively accounted for, between the two nations, or even the more tangible historical parallels. As we have seen, neither the early English translations nor the first British productions managed to bridge the cultural divide, but they left an impact on the way to approach Chekhov. The English translations of Chekhov tended to significantly Anglicise the plays and were far from successful in conveying its central concerns. They created an image of Chekhov as a non-political, melancholic, romantic English gentleman. This is the backdrop against which the great number of Irish rewritings of Chekhov should be interpreted. The dramatists themselves sum up most succinctly how they felt about this problem at the time of working on their translations/adaptations. Thomas Kilroy complains that “many English versions tended to anglify Chekhov to a very English gentility, as if the plays were set somewhere in the Home Counties” (“Introduction” 12). Brian Friel, too, expresses his resentment of the fact that Chekhov in Ireland is heard in Standard English. On his own “translation” of *Three Sisters* Friel remarks: “It was a kind of act of love, but after a while I began to wonder exactly what I was doing. I think *Three Sisters* is a very important play, but I feel that the translations which we have received and inherited in some way have not much to do with the language which we speak in Ireland” (Friel “Agnew Interview” 84).

The Irish as a translating nation: changing patterns

Not surprisingly, it is the importance of the “language issue,” so central to Irish culture, that is highlighted in Friel’s argument for a need to retranslate modern classics. Questions regarding language constitute a crucial element in the wider context of the attempts at intellectual decolonisation which the retranslations by Friel

and Kilroy contribute to. These rewritings within the trend of retranslating classics by Irish writers show how translation for the Irish is one means of reflecting on cultural issues and effecting change. In fact deploying translation as one of the means of furthering a cultural project in Ireland is a natural reaction, given the nature of Irish culture as a translating one. Irish history has always positioned the Irish at a crossroads of cultures and languages which had to negotiate meaning, making Ireland a translating nation in the widest sense of the word. As Robert Welch puts it,

for certain cultures, the Irish amongst them, translation is a crucial activity. There are obvious reasons for this, in that before the nineteenth century to speak of Irish culture is to speak of a different language and entirely different ways of seeing. Irish culture, for two hundred years, has in this very obvious sense, been in the business of translating itself to itself and to the outside world. (xi).

One should add that Ireland has been also busy translating the outside world to itself and, notably, into its own language, Hiberno-English. When it comes to importing literatures, contemporary Irish authors seem to feel an urge to refuse the intermediary role British culture and British Standard English have all too often played in this field. They set out to produce their own Hiberno-English versions of texts with the aim of replacing or updating the already existing and available Standard English translations. In general, the abundance of new translations and rewritings of European literary classics carried out by contemporary Irish authors and translators during the last three decades, whether they chose the literatures of Ancient Greece, Scandinavia or Russia, may very well be accounted for by the still felt need to counteract the dominance of

Standard English and to define Irish theatre in a European rather than an Anglo-Irish context.

Motivations to produce versions and adaptations vary, all of them intersecting with the already mentioned central cultural-political one. They range from a felt affinity with the original author on the translator's side (as it is pronouncedly true in the case of Friel's involvement with Chekhov), to ensuring a certain kind of authentication for the audience. Kilroy's thoroughly Hibernicised adaptation of Chekhov's *The Seagull*, for instance, was originally commissioned by the London Royal Court Theatre with the aim to bring it closer to its contemporary English audience by, seemingly paradoxically, relocating it into Ireland. The Irish versions, being, in a sense, "corrective" ones, as they reacted against the existing English translations, had a potential to allow both English and Irish audiences to rediscover Chekhov. It has already been discussed that English translations and productions of Chekhov's plays have long been perceived as highly problematic. The way the early translations presented Chekhov first to the British, and consequently to the Irish, audiences had a long-lasting effect of distorting the plays as well as Chekhov's image as a writer. These translations generally ignored the plays' political, historical and cultural context, creating an apolitical, sentimental "sorrowing evocation of valuable way of life gone forever" as Vera Gottlieb points out ("The dwindling scale" 151). The Irish versions are among the more innovative rewritings of Chekhov that are successful in rediscovering his comic genius and his use of irony, as well as restoring a sharper political edge to the plays.

It seems that the important context for this intense activity of rewriting masters of world literature is a deconolising endeavour since the earlier rewritings of Chekhov exemplify a decidedly political act of resisting English cultural influence in the name

of the “decolonisation process of the imagination” (qtd. in Richtarik 120) that Friel and the Field Day Theatre company called for in the early 1980s, and of which Friel’s *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* are great examples. Thomas Kilroy’s translocation of *The Seagull* into Ireland fits into this category too, with its thorough Hibernicisation, including references for instance to the land wars, and the drama of the Gaelic revival as well as the Anglo-Irish conflict, which is foregrounded in the play as the young Irish Constantine (Trepnev) is opposed to the successful English writer, Aston (Astrov).

However, a completely different emphasis is discernible in the retranslation of *Uncle Vanya* by McGuinness, which, instead of Hibernicising the play, is characterised by a foreignising approach. In a similar vein, Murphy’s *The Cherry Orchard* follows the source text closely and leaves the culture-specific elements expressing the difference between the source and the receiving culture intact. It is also indicative of change that Friel himself, although he kept returning to Chekhov after his *Uncle Vanya*, created Chekhovian adaptations that deal with private issues, abandoning the earlier public project of postcolonial re-appropriation.

Chapter Three: Public Projects: Irish Voices of Chekhov, Decolonising the Imagination

This chapter looks at the Irish versions of Chekhov's plays that can be seen as an integral part of the artistic and intellectual decolonising endeavour in the 1980s and part of 1990s in Ireland. An endeavour that, in Irish theatre history, is embodied in the Field Day Theatre Company's project, of which Friel was a founding member, and which Kilroy later joined too. Field Day was created with the definite political intent of promoting cultural dialogue between the North and South of Ireland, and addressing pressing issues arising in a post-colonial society like the political crisis in the North and its reverberations in the Republic. The re-appropriation of world classics by Irish playwrights in the last two decades of the twentieth century is contributing to the Field Day project. When Irish playwrights select modern classics outside the English literary heritage (which were transmitted through English culture in the form of Standard English translations) and rework them in a way that they reflect on Irish experiences and speak in an Irish idiom, they achieve the displacement of the earlier English versions. This, consequently, leads to the dismantling of the English cultural influence traditionally extended to the representation of foreign literature for Irish readers and audiences. In other words, the Irish retranslations and adaptations further a literary severance from the colonial legacy and at the same time enable a step towards cultural self-assertion.

Although it is only Brian Friel's *Three Sisters* (first performed by the Field Day Theatre Company in the Guildhall, Derry, on 8 September 1981) that was actually produced by Field Day, his later *Uncle Vanya* (first produced by the Gate Theatre, on 6 October 1998), and Thomas Kilroy's *The Seagull* (first performed at the

Royal Court Theatre, London, on 8 April 1981) are also both informed by the milieu in which artists strove for altering the cultural and political landscape of the island, with special attention to the identity problems related to the North. Field Day's activities, including touring plays around Ireland North and South as well as publishing pamphlets, all have the underlying agenda to provide, as Seamus Deane formulated it, "a sense or vision of the island's cultural integrity which would operate as a basis for an enduring and enriching political settlement" (qtd. in Andrews 165). This would also entail the "decolonising process of the imagination" as a central element. Stephen Rea, a key figure in the Field Day enterprise, expressed the importance of *Three Sisters* in this respect when he said "it was politically very important, it's an important assertion" (Pelletier, "Creating" 57). Indeed, an Irish playwright's privileging Hiberno-English over Standard English has a definite political edge and can function as cultural self-assertion. As Christopher Murray observes "language can never be a neutral force or medium in Ireland," and he goes on to note that "the language question, historically bound up in the suppression of Irish (i.e. Gaelic), and the consequent insecurity in Standard English by a colonised people, is invariably politicised, even in postcolonial Ireland" ("Two Languages" 97). Rea's assessment of the political importance of *Three Sisters* could be extended to the other two plays to be discussed here, Friel's *Uncle Vanya* and Kilroy's *The Seagull*. These rewritings of modern Russian classics, either in the form of retranslation or adaptation, share certain important characteristics. They demonstrate the perceived importance for Irish playwrights of the period to seize modern classics and re-appropriate them for Irish theatre. The ways in which re-appropriation is carried out disclose the underlying (though not necessarily conscious) agenda, which is to a great extent cultural-political. However, it is of great importance to note here that whenever

the political content of their work, or the political nature of their translation strategies are discussed, it is always meant in a profoundly anti-propagandist sense. The plays are political in the sense that they comment on important issues of contemporary Irish reality, and thus become shaping forces of that reality. As Vera Gottlieb puts it in connection with Chekhov's comedy, which she argues is both philosophical and political, theatre can be political without being didactic in that "it questions reality, inhibits audience escape into fantasy or dream, and places characters in an historically definable social milieu" ("The dwindling scale" 147). Friel's and Kilroy's versions are framed in even more political terms: both opt for infusing the plays with Irish structure and idiom as opposed to using Standard English and thus the resulting works display the features of resistant textual practices. Although the strategies employed when rewriting the source texts are different, they produce a rather similar result: domestication, or acculturation, of the original.

The domestication of the source plays is carried out to a different extent in each case. Kilroy's adaptation of *The Seagull* is a whole-scale acculturation of the Russian original by virtue of its being transposed to a completely new setting, that is, nineteenth-century Ireland, with the substantial alterations it involves, whereas Friel's retranslations of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* remain set in Russia. Nevertheless, the translation strategies Friel employs produce significantly domesticated, Hibernicised plays as well.

The Chekhov plays of Friel and Kilroy can be considered as resistant translations/adaptations on various accounts. First of all, their decision to render the Russian plays in an Irish idiom, or as a further step, to set the original in Ireland, is motivated by an urge to challenge the still felt dominance of British culture and Standard English. By the imposition of the English language on the indigenous

culture in Ireland in colonial times, the former colonial power “established at least partial control over reality” (Gilbert and Tomkins 164), and in many cases free translations or adaptations of classics participate in a reaction to the remnants of this legacy. Around the time when these rewritings were produced what Christopher Murray maintains still seemed true: “like Stephen Dedalus in Joyce’s portrait, every Irish writer has the sensation that his/her soul frets in the shadow of the language of the conqueror, England” (“Two Languages” 97). Creating Irish versions, that is, versions for primarily Irish audiences in English as it is spoken in Ireland, is a means of dispelling the Joycean anxiety regarding the English language. The Irish versions achieve this by displacing the Standard English versions in order to regain control over the canonical representation of Chekhov for the Irish. The fact that Friel’s *Three Sisters* is based on five of the existing English translations clearly indicates that his play explicitly aims at displacing earlier Standard English translations that served as the canonical representation of Chekhov for the British, and consequently for the Irish. Both Friel’s *Uncle Vanya* and Kilroy’s *The Seagull* demonstrate a similar linguistic resistance through their translational choices: they also privilege a marked Hiberno-English dialect. In retranslating and adapting Chekhov’s plays with an Irish focus, these Irish playwrights contribute to the intellectual decolonisation process, because, as Richard York puts it with regard to *Three Sisters*, their rewritings “refuse that truth speaks received Standard English” (“Friel’s Russia” 165). This resulted in a particular quality in Friel’s first two Hibernicised, domesticated versions of Chekhov: there is a subtle strain of “cultural imperialism” (not wholly unlike in the case of the thoroughly domesticated, earlier British translation of the plays) or, as Fintan O’Toole prefers to call it, there is an “attempt at a benign colonization” (qtd. in Jordan 120).

Friel's *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*, as well as Kilroy's *The Seagull* stage resistance not only to the legacy of cultural domination (stemming from the imposition of the English language); what is also challenged by Friel's and Kilroy's rewriting activity is the particular image of the original writer and his work, an image that was created through the translation process in Britain, and which then became canonised virtually as an English Chekhov. The strongly Anglicised and depoliticised Standard English translations result in a series of mistaken emphasis and thematic distortions, acutely felt by Irish playwrights. As it was discussed in Chapter Two, Chekhov's plays were often trivialised in former English language translations whereby they became detached from their original socio-historical context, or suffered alterations of ideas and characters to provide a romantic interest. These translating techniques served the aim to make the Russian plays adjustable to British tastes and expectations. Friel was dissatisfied with the existing Standard English translations not only because of their role in maintaining a certain cultural dominance in the Irish context, but also because he felt they greatly distorted the original: "when I looked closely at those texts (by certain Russian writers) the experience of those people seemed very much at odds with the experience as offered in most of the English translations. For example the received wisdom was that Chekhov was wistful and elusive and sweetly melancholy; and the English translations of the past 60 years have compounded that misreading" (qtd. in Kosok 103).

The early Irish rewritings of Chekhov are intent on ridding the Russian writer of his English guise and aim at restoring some of his original concerns. Intriguingly, Friel and Kilroy decide that drawing on the Irish analogies, in essence acculturating the plays, helps to achieve such a restoration. The concerns of Max Stafford Clarke, (who commissioned Kilroy's *The Seagull*), are echoed by other critics and rewriters.

Kilroy thought that staging *The Seagull* in Ireland would facilitate a healthy break with Chekhov's anglicisation, and it would also bring back the lost values of the play that belonged to "a rougher theatrical tradition, at once hard-edged and farcical, filled with large passions and very socially specific" ("Introduction" 12).

Irish Chekhov for the English Stage: Kilroy's *The Seagull*- Authentication by Alteration

"On 8 April 1982 Irish theatre came of age. It made Chekhov its own. Thomas Kilroy's is the achievement" (McGuinness, "A Voice" 14). It is with these words that Frank McGuinness concludes his essay on Thomas Kilroy's adaptation of *The Seagull*. McGuinness celebrates the eventual re-appropriation of Chekhov for Irish theatre symbolised by the new *The Seagull*. Indeed, Kilroy's groundbreaking attempt at acculturating this Russian classic by transposing it to late nineteenth-century rural Ireland is a successful one in making it more accessible to Irish audiences and at the same time creating a new play of his own with the added dimension of postcolonial Irish concerns. As Kilroy observes: "the resonances of Chekhov's play became even more universalised while I was also able to articulate, in this borrowing from a great European playwright, certain perceptions that I have had about the history of my own country" ("Adaptation" 80). The rather paradoxical backdrop to the success of Kilroy's *The Seagull* lies in the fact that it was commissioned by Max Stafford-Clark for the Royal Court Theatre, London, where it premiered on 8 April, 1981, only later to be transferred to Ireland.

Despite the circumstances of its commission and first production that are associated with English theatre, Kilroy's *The Seagull* is the work of an Irish

playwright whose career was definitely influenced by, and even intersected with, the Field Day enterprise in Ireland. Therefore, I argue that his adaptation of *The Seagull* is an organic part of and very much informed by the cultural milieu of the 1980s when Irish playwrights still felt the importance of finding ways to complete the decolonisation process. Kilroy himself has repeatedly acknowledged what he saw as the immense significance of the Field Day endeavour, one of the cultural forums of decolonisation. In a lavish praise he said: “for me, Field Day is the most important movement of its kind in Ireland since the beginning of this century. It has provided a platform for the life of the mind, of whatever persuasion, at a time when mindlessness threatens to engulf us all (Kilroy, “Author’s Note” 7).

Although *The Seagull* was not an actual Field Day play, it fits the definition Stephen Rea gave for a play produced by Field Day. In an interview Rea said it should be “a play of ideas, involved with language, involved with looking at imperialism, and looking at men who have one foot in Ireland and one foot in England” (Pelletier, “Against” 111). After *The Seagull*, Kilroy did produce a play, *Double Cross*, specifically for the Field Day Theatre Company in 1986, and in the author’s note he said that the play “derives from the whole debate about national identity which Field Day did so much to promote in the seventies and eighties” (qtd. in Brennan, “An Interview” 149). However, as the following analysis will demonstrate, his earlier adaptation of the Russian play in 1981 is already very much in line with this programme both by virtue of its dealing with issues of colonialism and the adaptation strategies it employs, which result in thorough Hibernicisation.

I argue for what Martine Pelletier also recognises in connection with Field Day, that “the extensive use the company made of the metaphor of rewriting and rereading” in their revisiting and revising “a painful inheritance in order to come to

terms with it” signals that adaptations and rewritings of classics proved to be one key strategy” in the work of the company. As for Kilroy, Pelletier continues, “it is tempting to think that these adaptations of Chekhov, Ibsen and Pirandello were influenced by [Kilroy’s] discussions with Field Day members and their insistence on the need to provide Irish audiences with version of the classics they could relate to and that would have been written in a recognisably Irish idiom” (“Against” 124). The way Kilroy carried out his Chekhov adaptation, to be discussed in the following, exemplifies that his adaptation technique positions the play in the category of resistant rewriting, which also links his play to the dramas produced by Field Day.

It is somewhat ironical that Thomas Kilroy’s thoroughly Hibernicised adaptation of Chekhov’s *The Seagull* was originally produced by an English director for an English audience. However, an interesting observation made with regard to Irish dramatists’ adaptations or translations of Chekhov, provides a convincing explanation. The playwright Michael West claims that “Irishness has come to signify authenticity on the stage,” and that “the Irishness makes the Russian more real: this is Chekhov in English, but not an English Chekhov” (18). His claim is understandable if we consider the general dissatisfaction with the English Chekhov felt even in English theatrical and literary circles. It appeared that the potential new dimensions that an Irish version may bring to the Chekhov play can provide a fresh look at Chekhov, too fossilised in his Anglicised image for English audiences and critics themselves.¹ The idea that a play by virtue of its being Irish authenticates it for English audiences dovetails with Irish theatre practitioners’ traditional role in terms of effecting renewal in English theatre. In his discussion of Murphy’s reception on the British stage, Fintan O’Toole observes that “Irish playwrights had a particular role to play in relation to the British theatre” (*The Politics*, 8). He goes on to argue that “The idea had long been

established in English theatre criticism that it is the function of Irish theatre ever so often to provide a playwright who would kick the London scene in the backside. Even while praising an Irish playwright, therefore, the tendency was to see his achievement entirely in terms of the English theatre” (O’Toole *The Politics*, 8).

If Irish renderings of Chekhov are perceived as more authentic representations than the English ones, it might be argued that Irish playwrights’ traditional role in revitalising English theatre extends to the representation of foreign drama on the British stage as well. Similarly to the plays by Murphy and other Irish writers that were seen as “lobbing grenades at London’s staidness” (O’Toole, *The Politics* 8), an Irish playwright’s version of Chekhov was welcomed as a disruption of the staidness of the conventional Anglicised Chekhov. This is partly due to the Irish versions’ achievement of discarding aspects of the English Chekhov, such as the romantic interest, the genteel upper class characters or the apolitical nature of the plays that the Anglicisation process layered on them, widely attracting criticism in England too.

Unlike in Friel’s case, no striking congeniality between Kilroy and Chekhov has been noted, and in fact, when asked in an interview about what drew him to adapting Chekhov (and Ibsen and Pirandello), Kilroy notes that the reason he did the adaptations was simply that he “was asked to do them” and because “each of them meant something to me imaginatively” (Roche, “An Interview” 155). However, the reason for his attraction to this particular play, *The Seagull*, might become clear if one considers Nicholas Grene’s insightful observation on characters in Kilroy’s original plays (*Talbot’s Box*, *Double Cross* and *The Secret Fall of Constance Wilde*). He notes that “Kilroy’s characters have the full autonomy of modern personhood with an implied interior consciousness and subjectivity. But that familiar idea of the person is held in play along with the earlier meanings associated with the concept of the

persona, the theatrical actor, the public agent.” Kilroy, Grene goes on, has a tendency to highlight “the theatrical fictiveness of his plays shaped from the actual lives of his historical characters,” he shows special interest in bringing awareness of “the constructedness of their lives” (70). Furthermore, “Kilroy’s search is always for styles, forms, idioms of theatre that can make manifest the multiple phenomenon of staging the self” (Grene 70). Little wonder that a playwright with such preoccupations was drawn to the most histrionic of Chekhov’s plays, one, whose concerns centre on actors, acting and the art of theatre.

Classifying the types of Irish adaptations of classics, Heinz Kosok places Kilroy’s *The Seagull* in the category of “acculturation as translocation” (“IASIL paper” n.p.), a very fitting term as the action is translocated from Russia to the West of Ireland. Thus *The Seagull* is a complete domestication of the original carried out on various levels of the play: its setting, characters and language use are all changed to fit the Irish context. However, while thoroughly Hibernicising the play by introducing Irish idiom, Irish and Anglo-Irish characters, names and numerous Irish concerns as well as culture-specific elements that substitute the Russian ones, Kilroy kept the play’s structure from plot line to each individual speech intact, and found Irish analogies effective to bring out the original concerns of the play.

The adaptor’s and director’s intention in resetting *The Seagull* on an Anglo-Irish estate in the West of Ireland may be seen, as mentioned before, as of corrective nature. Kilroy’s Chekhov is not at all un-political, the socio-political specificity of the play is far from being lost; on the contrary, it is greatly emphasised, although in an Irish context. Due to the alterations, the play becomes somewhat more overtly political in comparison with the original. It is especially so since the Irish household portrayed here is divided not only due to its members’ differing financial

circumstances and attitude to art and theatre, but also because of their differing ethnic background and allegiances: some of them are native Irish while others are Anglo-Irish or English.

The Seagull's total transplantation into a genuinely Irish milieu resulted in pervasive alterations on all levels of the play. The household of this Big House constitutes of Peter (Pjotr Sorin), the impoverished landlord, a former civil servant in Dublin Castle, who is fatally ill; his nephew, Constantine (Konstantin Treplev), who aspires to be a writer; Cousin Gregory (Shamraev), a poorer relation, who is in charge of running the estate in the absence of the landlord, a common phenomenon in Irish households. Gregory's wife is Pauline (Polina) and his daughter, Mary (Masha). The teacher (Medvedenko) becomes James, the doctor (Dorn) becomes Dr. Hickey. Both of them are Catholic, thus outsiders who are "admitted into the Anglo-Irish circle but, particularly in the case of the teacher, excluded as well" (Kilroy, "Adaptation" 83). Constantine's mother (Irina Nikolaevna Arkadina), who is visiting the estate, becomes Isobel Desmond, the Anglo-Irish actress on the London stage, while the writer (Boris Alexeevich Trigorin) is Mr. Aston here, a "prolific but minor English novelist" (Kilroy, "Adaptation" 83). The young girl from the neighbouring estate (Nina) becomes Lily, the would-be actress. Thus the characters are divided along the Anglo-Irish/Native Irish line, in fact "we have an Anglo-Irish family divided: some still looking to England as its natural motherland (like the actress, Isobel), some looking to the native Irish tradition for inspiration (like Isobel's son, Constantine) and this division mirrors historical reality in the period" Kilroy claims ("Adaptation" 84).

Kilroy did not find it necessary to radically change the names of the characters; to the extent it was possible he preserved the original ones though in the form of their English equivalent. The ones that underwent a more conspicuous change

still transfer/preserve one important feature of Russian literature. In Chekhov, as generally in Russian literature, the naming of characters usually constitutes one of the important devices of characterisation. Speaking names are a very salient feature of Russian literary works and reading them one should ideally be aware of this fact, thus, for instance in the original Treplev's name suggests "towsling," "knocking about" (from the verb *trepat'*) and it seems suggestive that he himself uses this word in connection with his mother's name being constantly in newspapers (Peace, *Chekhov – A Study* 162). The name of the provincial schoolteacher of peasant origin, Medvedev, is suggestive of "bear," the clumsy, down-to-earth creature that is the ever present figure in Russian folk tales. Kilroy, although in a more subtle form, maintained this feature of the original play, keeping the implicative force of names when he chose, for instance, the name James for the teacher, a rather ordinary name that might suggest his down-to-earth ordinariness. The name "Lily" raises associations with the concept of innocence, maybe even naivety, which are features of this particular character, while Dr Hickey's name might take on the connotation of the saying, "a doohickey job," referring to a patch-up solution that would not last.

As for the choice of setting, Kilroy says that locating the play in the West of Ireland enabled him "to find an equivalent for another, and charming, feature of the Chekhovian household – its promiscuous sociability, the way his houses fill up, not only with relatives but with a whole variety of hangers-on and the fact that this sociability crosses class lines" (Kilroy, "Adaptation" 82). There are several instances when one can realise how slight the social distinction is between landlord and professional or craft classes, how mutual poverty "tended to efface the stiffnecked barriers created by politics and social snobbery" (Kilroy, "Adaptation" 83). Cousin

Gregory, the estate manager constantly refuses the requests of his landlords and he usually does this in a manner verging on the rude.

Being transferred to nineteenth-century Ireland, the play's whole range of realia is changed. The much longed-for metropolitan centres where most of the characters want to escape are Dublin and London instead of Moscow. Peter yearns for walking in Dublin from College Green to the Club, or just around Broadstone, Kildare Street or Grattan Blakes; we hear of the Kilmore Woods and Rossmore Lake, the River Shannon, Kingstone and Holyhead; or the Cork Exhibition and the Coutts Bank. Isobel is presented not with a broach but with a piece of Limerick lace. The members of the Anglo-Irish landowning family make constant references to Victorian authors like Tennyson, the Brontes or Dickens, or actors like Madge Kendal, Ellen Terry, the Keans, the Kembles (Kosok, "Cracks" 109).

In addition to the geography and culture-specific elements of the play, what most effectively ensures its Irishness is the use of a distinctly Irish turn of phrase, which is more conspicuous in the case of characters belonging to the lower classes, or who have no pretensions to sound like the English. Hiberno-English syntax seeps through, for instance, the speeches of the Catholic schoolteacher, James: "It's the smoking causes the bad health" (39); or "your father won't give me the land of a horse" (70), or talking about their baby: "It's been left on his own three nights running, without yourself, that has me worried" (70). Similarly, the utterances of those characters who live and work on the estate in the West of Ireland are peppered with distinct Irishisms. Cousin Gregory, who manages the estate, flatters Isobel: "it's younger you're getting every day" (77); his wife, Pauline says: "I think it's great the way you've become the writer, after all, Constantine" (71). Dr Hickey exclaims when given a bunch of flowers: "Ah, now, is it for me they are?" (44).

Several significant alterations serve the purpose of representing the Irish Ascendancy milieu in the Chekhovian framework, and by doing so they make the socio-political specificity of the original impressively come to the surface. One of the parallels between Chekhov's Russia and nineteenth-century Anglo-Ireland which became "extraordinarily vivid and apt" for Kilroy (Kilroy, "Adaptation" 80) during his reworking of the play is the range of similarities between the position of the Anglo-Irish gentry and the Russian land-owning class in their respective countries. At the end of the nineteenth century both were on the verge of being swept away, rapidly losing their economic and political power. In addition, both represented and enacted imperial authority over a much larger, subservient population. Both played significant roles in the Crown Civil Service and in military command which did so much to preserve that power in their respective countries. For both, the source and symbol of that power was the country estate with its dependent peasantry or serfs (Kilroy, "Adaptation" 81).

There is one crucial distinction, however, between the two ruling classes. The Russian gentry at least could claim a shared common nationality with the lower classes, whereas the Anglo-Irish landlords represented a foreign power in Ireland (Kilroy, "Adaptation" 82). The portrayal of an Anglo-Irish family is exactly the aspect of Kilroy's *The Seagull* which inevitably makes it more political than the original, as with the introduction of the colonial dimension the tensions originating from oppression come closer to the surface in the Irish version. In this context, the hostility between the older writer and the young Constantine takes on a special edge. Aston, the successful writer dispossesses the young Constantine: not only does he rob him of the love of both his mother and lover, but takes possession of Constantine's failure and even his death by way of using them as raw material for his own artistic

work. The fact that Aston is English is significant: it strengthens the accord of the theme of dispossession in a way that it must strike sensitive notes for the Irish, and disturbing ones for the English audiences, and thus tones up the politics of the play.

By adding his own lines to the text, Kilroy laced the play with several issues that were central in Ireland in the period. Isobel is given extra lines in which she complains how the country has changed: “People gone away. Houses closed-up. Why, they tell me it is dangerous now to travel in the open from here to Ardahan. What on earth is happening to us?” (30). She is referring to the consequences of the often violent events of the “Land Wars” of 1879-82, which involved a successful struggle for tenant power. We learn from Pauline that the estate is “bankrupt like every other estate in the West of Ireland” and that they stopped paying the rents so “the Land Leaguers will have nothing to take of what’s left” (44). Lily says that at home she can hear “nothing but talk of rents, the Land League and new Coercion Acts to stop the Troubles” (32). Peter, too, complains of “the tenants in revolt” and mentions disapprovingly “this man Parnell” (59).

Other changes foreground some Irish cultural issues of the period. Dr Hickey in the adaptation talks about his visit to Paris (not Genoa, as in the original), which provides an opportunity for references that are very much culture-specific. He reports that “there is great interest nowadays over there in the Celtic thing and all that. I believe Professor de Joubainville’s lectures on the old Celtic mythology are highly regarded in the College de France” (75). Kilroy sends the doctor to Paris and mentions De Joubainville’s lectures (which in fact were attended by John M. Synge in 1898) in order “to draw attention to the fact that the Anglo-Irish fascination with Celtic mythology and folklore was not confined to Ireland at that time” (Kilroy, “Adaptation” 86).

The original Chekhov play's central concern is with theatre and art (more precisely, artistic failure), which provides further parallels between Russia and Ireland, and thus encourages the intercultural transfer of the play. Similarities exist not only due to the simple fact that like the Anglo-Irish contribution to the English-speaking theatre, Chekhov's contribution to the Russian theatre was also immeasurable. As Kilroy claims, the characters' passion for theatre is "the most distinctive connection of all between the Anglo-Irish and the Russian worlds" ("Adaptation" 83). Despite the distance between the cultural heritage of these countries, parallels offer themselves. In the 1880s and 1890s both in Russia and Ireland, as was also the case in fact in most European countries, radical changes were introduced by the modernist trend in arts. In Ireland it was the time of the beginning of the Irish Literary Revival Movement. The Irish Literary Theatre (founded in 1897 by William Butler Yeats) staged plays which consciously turned away from the well-made and drawing room plays of the conservative London theatre. Instead, the Irish plays, which are often described as poetic drama combining the features of symbolism and naturalism, drew their inspiration from Celtic myths and legends and the life of the Irish peasantry. The drama the Revivalists wrote and staged must have had "the same novelty and strangeness for its Anglo-Irish audiences as Symbolist drama would have had for the Russian audience represented by the household of *The Seagull*" (Kilroy, "Adaptation" 83). Or for that matter, as strange as Chekhov's realistic drama steeped in symbolism for its audience of the Moscow Art Theatre. These parallels are reflected in the transformations carried out in the Kilroy adaptation.

The nature of art and artistic failure are central themes in *The Seagull*, most of the characters are either already artists or aspire to become one, and even those ones

who are not are rather given to theatricality: Mary wears black to play the role in which she “mourns for her life,” Cousin Gregory, too, has his moments of performance. Also, they all express their distinct point of view on art’s nature and purpose in their snippets of philosophising. In the adaptation the failed relationship between mother and son, and Constantine’s jealousy, are played out in the context of two conflicting trends in theatre, the conventional theatre represented by Isobel, an Anglo-Irish actress living in London, and the new, artistic Celtic drama advocated by Constantine. They are mutually hostile to each other’s art, Constantine dismisses his mother’s roles in “boring imitations of boring French comedies,” where “everything’s unreal, unreal clothing, unreal complexions, unreal feelings. All served up in that polite, dead language. No roots. No contact with nature, with people” (21). Constantine’s own goal in writing his “Celtic” play based upon ancient Irish myth is to revitalise theatre and “bring back the ancient wisdom, the eternal, the infinite [...]” (21). His words and programme echo the dramatists of the Irish Literary Renaissance, who decided to turn away from the traditional drama of the day and strove to create a native Irish theatre based on the ancient Celtic heritage of the country. Isobel’s anxiety and hostility to the “Celtic rubbish, that Hibernian drivel,” as she sees Constantine’s play, is not due to the fact that her son is not talented. It is fuelled by “the added political threat in that Constantine’s play comes out of the suppressed culture” (Kilroy, “Adaptation” 84) and thus embodies the potential threat of rebellion against her class and property.

The Chekhovian play-in-the-play written by Konstantin can be classed as a weak attempt to emulate Maeterlinck’s autonomous theatrical world based on the “motionless” or “symbolic” method. Similarly, in the adaptation Konstantin’s play is merely an amateurish one, one of the numerous poor attempts at imitating the

exquisite mythological dramas of Yeats, Lady Gregory and Synge. Still, Kilroy had Yeats in mind when creating the figure of the Anglo-Irish Constantine as Yeats too, “was immensely aware of the obstacles in his attempts to write ‘of the people’ ” and “struggled to get the balance right” (“Adaptation” 87). Like Yeats, Constantine realises the difficulty to overcome the ambivalence inherent in his Anglo-Irish origins when at the moment of illumination he exclaims: “Useless, absolutely useless! ‘We need new forms that will bring back the ancient wisdom of the people’. What does that mean? I have no contact with the people. Merely stories out of old books written in a strange, lost language. – New forms! What does any of it matter so long as it is true to what one feels?” (81)

Another opinion regarding theatre comes from the schoolmaster, who argues that plays should be written about the life of schoolteachers. In Chekhov, this idea may be a reference to the voice of the “narodnik” movement in Russia, which had its corresponding artistic trend in the Irish folksy plays and the works by playwrights of the emerging Catholic middle class in the changing Ireland. In Kilroy, it is James, the Catholic schoolmaster, who says that “someone should write about schoolteachers. That’d be the right subject. The hardness of life. The struggle to make ends meet” (30). Yeats disapproved of this newly emerging Irish writing without the aesthetic pursuits of high literature. He considered the writers of this movement “to be impoverished as they were unable to distance themselves from their material. They were, in a sense, overwhelmed by sociology [...] and lacking in literary quality” (qtd. in Kilroy, “The Literary” 11).

The Irish resonances in Kilroy’s *The Seagull* are evoked via certain lines added by the adaptor, which may be seen as reflecting on certain aspects of the psychological legacy of colonial domination on the colonial subject, such as

dependency, ambivalence, sense of inferiority and tendency to mimicry, or the internalising of colonialist images. The servile and pathetic James, an Irish Catholic trying to cling to the family, supports Isobel's attack on the Celtic play, and consequently on his own cultural heritage, when saying "this whole notion of Celtic culture is dangerous, don't you know" (30). His attitude appears to illustrate how the suppressed tend to unconsciously internalise the imperialist images, which, as Joseph Lee argues, is considered to be a peculiar psychological mechanism of "working out of enormous psychological pressures" (248). Another issue that might be associated with the impact of colonialism is problem-drinking and its general tolerance in Ireland. Mary in the play is right on the way of becoming an alcoholic but nobody seems to take it seriously. Peter easily finds an excuse for her: "Who can blame her? Dreadful situation. What difference does it make, if the poor thing finds it easier" (40). Another type of psychological defence strategy oppressed people tend to resort to appears in Doctor Hickey's words: "It's the curse of this day and age. No one willing to face life as it is. Everyone looking for escape, even if it means wrecking the constitution" (40). In another addition to the original text, the doctor describes Constantine as someone who "has a genuine feeling for this old country. Trouble is, he doesn't know who he is or where he's going" (80). His words can be interpreted as an allusion to the schizophrenic attitude of the Anglo-Irish to their own identity, a sense of a double identity, or rather, being in-between two worlds, Yeats called in his autobiographical writing "Anglo-Irish solitude."

McGuinness saw the importance of Kilroy's adaptation in the context of Irish cultural self-assertion as a means of critical engagement with the legacy of the colonial experience. So did other commentators, like Thierry Dubost, who also considers Kilroy's *The Seagull* as symptomatic of the issues of its own time in that it

reinforces the process of “disconnection with the former British Empire” (155). What he emphasises as of central importance is the particular type of plays chosen for adaptation, that is, “Kilroy’s creation of cultural landmarks that are initially alien to British culture” (Dubost 155) (apart from Chekhov, Kilroy adapted Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in 1996, and Ibsen’s *Ghosts* in 1989). I take this argument even further, claiming that the adaptation strategy used by Kilroy, together with the resulting whole-scale acculturation of the original, is an especially important indicator of his adaptation’s being linked to the decolonizing project. In the period when Kilroy created his Chekhov adaptation, cultural self-assertion in Irish drama was perceived achievable through a vigorous and intensive appropriation of the source, whatever its origins are. The English cultural framework that used to act as an intermediary for presenting foreign plays for Irish audiences could be most effectively displaced by establishing an oppositional, Irish framework.

Irish Chekhov for the Irish Stage: Brian Friel’s Retranslations of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*

Friel and Chekhov

Brian Friel’s two decades’ long involvement with Chekhov’s plays began with a retranslation of *Three Sisters*, an endeavour which started off as “an act of love,” a private involvement stemming from a passionate interest in language, communication and translation, but one which at the same time yielded a very much public success as one of the most acclaimed productions of the Field Day Theatre Company. At the time when Friel created his first rewriting of Chekhov, a consensus had already been established in the critical community regarding Friel’s “notable affinity” with

Chekhov in terms of a “shared thematic interest, mood, character and dramatic technique” (Andrews 182). He has been called the “Irish Chekhov” by Richard Pine, as perhaps it is in Friel’s works among the Irish playwrights that one can find the most conspicuous Chekhovian touches both in the domain of themes and that of dramatic devices. Robert Tracy suggests nothing less than that Chekhov is not simply a source or an influence for Friel but “a kind of presence in certain of Friel’s plays, sharing, as he does, Friel’s preoccupation with language, communication, and memory both as themes and as dramatic devices” (77). Pine also draws attention to possible analogies between the worlds of Chekhov and Friel: “Chekhov’s people who spend their entire lives waiting, hoping for something, people who are quite convinced that real life is elsewhere – these I think Friel recognises as being also very Irish themes, because of the nineteenth-century experiences of emancipation and of famine” (Kurdi, “The World” 241). Among Friel’s plays, as it was mentioned before, it is especially *Living Quarters* (1977) and *Aristocrats* (1979) that are discussed as displaying Chekhovian touches, but *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) is also seen as largely influenced by Friel’s Russian master. Indeed, an element that most intriguingly links *Dancing at Lughnasa* with *Three Sisters* is that the failed dance scene added by Friel to *Three Sisters* comes to a fulfilment and blossoming in the passionate dance of the Mundy sisters.

Friel’s versions of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* have been given little critical attention from the angle of translation studies and with an eye to their embeddedness in their social-political context. Instead, discussions of the playwright’s translations of Russian plays, for instance by Richard Pine and Elmer Andrews, focused mainly on the affinity between Friel’s sensibility and nineteenth-century Russia, the reason being a general consensus among critics that “Friel

generally translates these texts faithfully” (Boltwood 9). York says “to a very large extent (though not entirely) speeches in the Friel version correspond one by one to the speeches of the Chekhov play” (“Friel’s Russia” 167), which is quite unfounded. However, this kind of view is likely to have originated in the critics’ lack of access to the original Russian texts and hence thorough comparison, and also because they, perhaps, left Friel’s claims on the subject uncontested due to their deferential attitude to Friel’s comments.

Although F. C. McGrath in his book *Brian Friel’s (Post)Colonial Drama*, maintains that Friel belongs to the canon of postcolonial writers and claims that the dramatist’s preoccupation with language is central to the understanding of his oeuvre, he completely ignores to mention, let alone discuss, Friel’s early translations of Chekhov in the specific context of the book. This is regrettable not only because *Three Sisters* forms an important part of Friel’s contribution to the Field Day enterprise and *Uncle Vanya* is done in a similar vain, but also because Friel’s resistant translation strategies and the general agenda of domestication/re-appropriation clearly indicate that the creation of the plays was far from a case of neutral linguistic and artistic exercise, but very much informed by Friel’s involvement in the issues of the day, related to decolonisation.

Friel’s *Three Sisters*

Friel’s *Three Sisters* became the second production of the Derry-based Field Day Theatre Company, following the writer’s hugely successful *Translations*, written specifically for the company in 1980. Field Day was founded in the same year by Friel himself and Stephen Rea, “with the intention of finding or creating a space between unionism and nationalism and proving by example the possibility of a shared

culture in the North of Ireland” (Richtarik 7). This programme implies the idea of culture as an alternative space to politics, urgently called for by artists in the Northern Ireland of the 1970s and 1980s. Field Day, as Marilynn Richtarik points out, “especially in its early years, has been part of the more general attempt by artists and intellectuals to circumvent politics through culture” (7).

If the various levels of affinity between Chekhov’s and Friel’s worlds and artistic dispositions explain, at least partly, the latter’s decision to rewrite *Three Sisters*, Field Day’s choosing the play as its second production can be appreciated when one looks at the parallel between the stagnation and endless waiting characteristic of the thwarted ambitions and frustrated lives portrayed in the play and the way Seamus Deane describes the Northern situation:

Once one or the other community achieves its ideal – an Ulster secure from its enemies, a 32-county Republic – then and only then will all be well and will people have restored to them all those rights – the right to life, the right to housing, work, legal justice – which have necessarily been suspended in the meantime. So the whole culture stagnates while it waits for the great day of constitutional reckoning. When that day dawns, our political leaders will feel free to grant what the existing situation will not allow. But in the meantime – nothing. For the Northern minority, everything will be fine when they accept the State; for the rest of Ireland, particularly its minorities, everything will be liberalised when peaceful reunification takes place. But neither acceptance nor reunification are remote possibilities. So the

present is determined by the promise of an unrealisable future. (qtd. in Richtarik 116)

As Richtarik astutely points out, Deane's words "recall the three sisters' yearning for Moscow," in effect their stagnating life, similarly determined by the promise of an unrealisable future (Richtarik 116).

Three Sisters, together with *Translations* and *The Communication Cord* (1983) (the third production by Field Day) are sometimes grouped together in discussions as "language plays" due to their focus on what language means for a culture and how it functions, or disfunctions, in human communication. Through an action that shows the displacement of the Irish language by the language of the coloniser in 1830s rural Ireland, *Translations* deals with language and what it means for the given community, and also its role in communication. As several critics have shown, Friel's ideas about language were profoundly influenced by George Steiner's book, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1975), so much so that some lines of the play come almost verbatim from this book. Steiner's idea of translation as central to human communication also must have had deep reverberations for Friel, himself involved in a translation process working on *Three Sisters*. Steiner claims that "any model of communication is at the same time a model of translation, of a vertical or horizontal transfer of significance. No two historical epochs, no two social classes, no two localities use words and syntax to signify exactly the same things, to send identical signals of valuation and inference. Neither do two human beings" (qtd. in Richtarik 33).

The implications of the above are dramatised in *Translations*, where through the relationship between members of the two communities the idea that a foreign

language can “interpret between privacies” (446) is challenged. But the play is also partly about the difficulties of using a language that is not quite one’s own, a problem formulated most famously by Joyce, but felt by Irish writers of all generations. Friel has said that *Translations* is about “the whole problem that the writers in this country experience: having to handle a language that is not native to him [...] But I’m not talking about the revival of the Irish language. I’m just talking about the language we have now and what use we make of it” (qtd. in Richtarik 37).

Given his cultural background as a Northern Irish writer, Friel is inevitably preoccupied with issues pertaining to the language question both in his dramatic work and other publications. Regarding the legacy of English rule and its linguistic consequences, once he said:

There will be no solution (to the Irish problem) until the British leave this island, but even when they have gone, the residue of their presence will still be with us. This is an area that we still have to resolve, and that brings us back to the question of language for this is one of the big inheritances which we have received from the British. [...] We must continually look at ourselves, recognise and identify ourselves. We must make English identifiably our own language. (Friel, “Agnew interview” 87)

“Making English identifiably our own language” is not only one of the important concerns of the play *Translations*, but it is also manifest in Friel’s own translation philosophy and practice with regard to the creation of the version of *Three Sisters*. In *Translations*, Hugh, referring to the new Anglicised-place names says “We must learn

those new names.... We must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must make them our new home” (444). The same idea of the necessity for the Irish to make English identifiably their own language is a manifest claim in Friel’s *Three Sisters*, whose translation demonstrates the playwright’s pervasive urge to acculturate the Russian classic, and replace the existing Standard English translations with his own Hiberno-English one.

The Field Day directors chose the Russian classic, at least partly, due to a “desire to avoid associating Field Day with any particular political position” (Richtarik 108), especially after *Translations* was generally received as a highly political play. However, although Friel himself, too, “appeared to be particularly anxious to dispel the impression that Field Day had some sort of hidden agenda” (Richtarik 109), the translation process he employed positions *Three Sisters* well within the frame of resistant textual practice on account of its political implications. In other words, it makes the translation fit smoothly in the wider cultural-political project of the Field Day Theatre Company, one of whose aims was “to perform plays of excellence in a distinctively Irish voice that would be heard throughout the whole of the island” (qtd. in Richtarik 109). By producing his Hibernicised *Three Sisters*, Friel introduces the use of distinctive Irish English into the sphere of rendering foreign literature, which also, he feels, should be made to sound more familiar for Irish audiences in order to create a culturally assertive attitude. Thus, the reasons for his transposing the play into Hiberno-English seem to be, to a degree, political. The very method indicates this, since Friel composed his version not on the basis of the Russian original, but, importantly, carried out a retranslation based on several pre-existing Standard English translations into English as it is spoken in Ireland. Indeed, any Irish writer’s privileging of Hiberno-English or Irish over Standard English

amounts to a subtle political act and Friel's retranslation of *Three Sisters* may be seen as a piece of resistant translation in the sense that it refuses the idea that classics should always speak received Standard English, the language of the ex-coloniser. To explain this intention to de-anglify existing translations of Chekhov, Friel says in an interview in December 1980:

I think that the versions of *Three Sisters* that we see and read in this country always seem to be redolent of either Edwardian England or the Bloomsbury set. Somehow the rhythms of these versions do not match with the rhythms of our own speech patterns, and I think that they ought to, in some way. Even the most recent English translations again carry, of necessity, very strong English cadences and rhythms. This is something about which I feel strongly—in some way we are constantly overshadowed by the sound of the English language, as well as by the printed word. Maybe this does not inhibit us, but it forms us and shapes us in a way that is neither healthy nor valuable for us. (Friel, "Agnew Interview" 84)

Accordingly, Friel's version of *Three Sisters* reclaims Chekhov from the Anglicised traditions while reappropriating his work for the Irish literary canon by Hibernicising the play, thereby rendering it more accessible for twentieth-century Irish audiences. This corrective retranslation was seen to serve as a means of establishing aesthetic independence in Irish theatre. Thus, Friel's Hiberno-English *Three Sisters* had acquired an organic role in furthering the "decolonisation process of the imagination" which, in Friel's opinion, was "very important if a new Irish personality is to emerge" (qtd. in Richtarik 121).

Although Field Day's press release for the play described it as "a translation in the deepest sense of the word" (qtd. in Richtarik 112), Friel's *Three Sisters* is not an example of translation proper, first and foremost because, as the writer readily admits, he has no knowledge of Russian. He created what might be termed as second hand translation, involving that a "literal translation," for want of a better word, made by someone proficient in the source language is commissioned to serve as the base for a new translation. However, instead of one such literal translation Friel used six already available English-language translations and on the basis of those texts turned the play's language into the English that is spoken in Ireland today. Nonetheless, the general critical acceptance of his *Three Sisters* as a translation, and a definitely highly regarded one at that (at least in Irish circles), reflects not only the prestigious status of Friel, but also the importance of his translation practice as a means of cultural assertion as well as its subtle political implications. Indeed, the press release also claims that "Friel interprets Chekhov's masterpiece for contemporary audiences in conveying not only the meaning of the original words but also the essence and significance of Chekhov's vision. He illuminates for us the complexities and confusions of life in Ireland today" (qtd. in Richtarik 112).

Friel's Chekhov translation, bringing the text closer to contemporary Irish life, is a noticeably and avowedly domesticated one: acculturation and appropriation are pervasive strategies used not only to achieve the Hibernicising effect of the infusion of Irish idiom but also to alter the play through numerous added lines conveying Irish concerns and, by changes in its structure, to approximate it to Friel's original plays. This way, Friel appropriated the Russian original both for the Irish theatrical canon and his own oeuvre. Such a translation practice, to be discussed in more detail in the following, signals the lack of an intention to stick to old-fashioned "fidelity," or

following the source text closely, the translation instead aspires to the status of an original work. Instead of moving the translation towards the source text and culture, this practice slants the text towards the receiving audience and its culture.

Friel's techniques of domestication and appropriation

The most immediate way of domesticating *Three Sisters* is its relocation into the Hiberno-English idiom. Friel gives most of the characters the occasional Irish turn of phrase, which is most obvious in the case of the servants and Natasha, who are not members of the intelligentsia represented by the Prozorov sisters and their family friends. Natasha fears that she was “making an eejit” of herself before the guests at Irina’s birthday party and exclaims: “God but that’s a wild big crowd” (37), and later, now as his wife, she complains to Andrey: “not that your sister heeds the likes of me” (43). When she is already the dominant person in the household and wants to get rid of Anfisa, the old nanny, who is “no use anymore,” she shouts that Anfisa should be “out in the bog!” (76). When frightened by Kulygin, she exclaims: “you put the heart across me!” (120) and later she admits that she is “as thick as poundies” (77). Masha also uses “thick” to describe the citizens of the town. The servant Anfisa’s speech, too, is full of colloquial Irishisms. She calls the frightened daughters of Vershinin “poor wee souls” (73), and greets Irina as “my wee pet” (114). Exasperated when Vershinin leaves suddenly before drinking his long-awaited tea, she says: “What sort of a square buck’s that?” (61) Her happiness is expressed in idioms like: “aren’t we as happy as a pair of pups together?”, “didn’t we fall on our feet?” (114) Ferapont’s few utterances also sound distinctly Irish: “Did you hear tell, Miss,...?” (74)

In other cases Friel colours the dramatic discourse by adding English idioms. When Natasha tries to make up the quarrel with Olga in the original she simply says:

“Forgive me Olga, I didn’t want to distress you” (528). In Friel, she uses an English idiom: “Sure I wouldn’t upset you for all the tea in China” (77). The Russian word *kapriznitsa*² (=capricious girl) applied to Irina by Kulygin is changed to the expression: “don’t be a little Miss Cross Patch Draw The Latch!” (70). Together with Irishisms, the associations raised through these expressions leave Russia far behind and locate the play in English-speaking Ireland with the characters becoming familiar personality types whom the Irish audience can probably identify with easily.

A domesticating translation displays an inevitable tendency to localise the realia of the original to approximate the text to the receiving audience. More often than not Friel chooses to acclimatise the expressions that are connected with the Russian way of life. He decides to abandon the uniquely Russian custom of calling others by their Christian name and patronym. Thus Friel’s Irina calls Chebutikin “dear, darling, dopey doctor!” (15) instead of “Ivan Romanich, milyj Ivan Romanich!” (494). Ferapont addresses Andrey “Mister Andrey” (91) instead of “Andrey Sergeich” (536) and the form expressing endearment, “Andrjusha” (501), becomes “Poor little Andrey” (28); Anfisa calls Vershinin “*batushka*,” a typical informal Russian phrase of address (518) but calls him “Sir” (58) in Friel.³

The sense that the play is thoroughly approximated to its Irish audience is further strengthened by Friel’s use of realia from the English cultural heritage that is also part of Irish culture. In Chekhov, Act II is framed with the hardly audible sound of an accordion on the street off stage and the silent song of the nanny at the end of the act, which is followed by Natasha’s appearance. The sound of the accordion undoubtedly evokes feelings of sadness, which underpins the whole action of the scene, when Natasha is well on the way of dispossessing the sisters and forcing her will on them. In Friel’s version, the music does not merely consist of the sound of the

accordion, but he chose a Victorian favourite, “Won’t You Buy My Pretty Flowers” sung by a girl off stage. It is “slow and haunting and sad” according to his stage direction, and apart from successfully evoking the feelings of melancholy, nostalgia and loss, it also takes the audience from Russia to Ireland.

The Irish and English references, however, are mixed with Russian cultural references. Beside the many Russian literary allusions that are either left intact when they draw on symbols shared in the European culture, or edited out if too foreign in their implications, the allusion to Shakespeare is highlighted in Friel’s translation. In the scene when Natasha, already the new mistress of the house, walks across the stage with a candle after the great fire, Masha comments in the original: “She walks as if she had started the fire” (*Она ходит так, как будто она подожгла*). Chekhov had in mind the literary image of Lady Macbeth and he told so when he gave instructions to Stanislavsky (Peace, *Chekhov-A Study* 111). Friel’s Masha exclaims: “Lady Macbeth walks again!” (90) therefore the literary allusion hidden in an indirect comment is made explicit. Among the literary references, Masha’s words about how she had an “epiphany” is a subtle reference that conjures up for an Irish audience Joyce and his preoccupation with stagnation, inaction, unfulfilled lives.

Various aspects of Friel’s translation strategy point to his appropriating urge, which makes him treat the text with considerable freedom. Inserting his additions into the original text is one such method. The additions appear on various levels: it is the lines added to characters’ speeches that establish the Irish context of the play most conspicuously, but he also created and added new scenes as well as stage directions, which bring *Three Sisters* closer to his own original plays.

Friel’s adding to the original text words and lines of his own that seem to convey the sense of the speech with specifically Irish resonances is one of his means

of adjusting the Russian play so that it reflects Irish cultural and social reality. Friel's audience of "the land of saints and scholars" hear Andrey complain that their provincial town "has not produced one person of any distinction – not one saint, not one scholar, not one artist" (111). Michael Frayn, one of the most acclaimed English translators of Chekhov (who translated *Three Sisters* a couple of years after Friel) renders these lines as "not one, who's been ready to die for a cause—not one scholar, not one artist, nobody even faintly remarkable" (Frayn 273). In other instances, Friel slightly alters lines so that they may reflect experiences in violence-ridden Northern Ireland. For instance, he has one character say: "the most wonderful thing about the human spirit is its resilience" (24) while another character warns: "God alone knows how the way we live will be assessed. To us it's – it's how we live, our norm. But maybe in retrospect it will look anxious and tense. Maybe even ... morally wrong" (25). Such utterances, too, are highly likely to have strong connotations for Irish audiences and thus they emphatically establish the contemporariness and topicality of the play. The result is a version that updates and localises the political content of the original.

By introducing alterations in the speech of certain characters with the result of emphasising the fatuity of the constantly philosophising Baron and Vershinin, Friel is seen to "challenge a political rhetoric of hope and escape then common in Northern Ireland, and presumably all too familiar to his Field Day audience" (Tracy 72). Friel stresses Vershinin's awareness of himself being a dreamer, a mere windbag, by having him constantly mock his own role as an "instant philosopher" and the optimistic "solutions according to Vershinin" (83). As for the Baron, Friel enhances the original effect of his distinctive manner of speaking by peppering his speech with empty phrases, such as "If I understand you correctly", "I mean to say", "the point

I'm trying to make is this", "what I'm suggesting is...". The purpose of these expressions would be to make the Baron's talk more to the point, but the ironical fact that they fail to prevent him from being lost in his train of thought stresses the character's superficiality. By introducing an ironic aspect to the philosophising Vershinin and Baron Tusenbach, i.e., to emphasise that they are mere windbags, Friel "examines clichés that had become all too common in Northern Ireland, clichés about enduring, about hope for an indefinitely postponed better future" (Tracy 72).

Apart from the futility and stagnation that characterise the world of Chekhov's three sisters as well as that of their Northern Irish audience in 1980, Friel injected into the play some slight hope as well. The lines he has given to Vershinin carries a positive tone: "we must keep believing in a future for our children that is open and honest and free. Because the very fact of clinging on to that belief is in itself the beginning of a release, a liberation. Maybe the only liberation available to us..." (104).

The Frielian addenda include not only lines, but scenes as well. The original play is expanded by the addition of two minor scenes of Friel's own creation. In Act II the playwright develops a whole episode from a remark made by Chebutykin on a piece of news he reads out to the others: "Balzac was married in Berdichev town" (54). In the original this snippet of conversation is not given attention, except that Irina half-consciously repeats it once. In Friel, however, Irina sings the line, then together with Roddey and Fedotik they begin to improvise a song as described in the stage instructions:

*Pause. There is a sense that this moment could blossom, an expectancy
that suddenly everybody might join in the chorus-and dance-and that*

the room might be quickened with music and laughter. Everyone is alert to this expectation; it is almost palpable, if some means of realising it could be found. Vershinin moves close to Masha. If the moment blossoms, they will certainly dance. Fedotik moves close to Irina (to Roddey's acute annoyance); they, too, will dance. Tusenbach sits at the piano. As soon as he begins picking out the melody:

FEDOTIK. Good man, Baron! (55)

Unfortunately, however, “*the moment is lost*” (56) and the feeling left behind is that of embarrassment. Shortly after this episode, a similar interlude occurs when the Baron plays the Blue Danube Waltz on the piano and “*Masha dances by herself. As before, there is the possibility that the occasion might blossom. But there is less possibility this time*” (65). This moment of abandonment will be fulfilled by the dance of the Mundy sisters in Friel’s 1990 play, *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

Another Frielian inclusion centres on an image that aligns his *Three Sisters* with the Irish literary canon. In Friel, Doctor Chebutykin’s self-condemning monologue, evoked by the death of one of his patients due to his incompetence, is addressed, significantly, to his reflection in the mirror in second person: “To hell with you specifically, my friend. You know why you’re drunk, don’t you? Course you do. We both know” (79). The mirror, as a symbol of searching for and exploring one’s identity is a recurring image in Irish literature, from Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* through Joyce’s “the cracked looking glass of a servant” that is the symbol of Irish art according to Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses*, to Friel’s own *Dancing at Lughnasa* or *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

A great deal of stage directions is also added to Friel's version. This practice can be viewed as another manifestation of the affinity between the two writers in the sense that both Friel and Chekhov have the vein of the fiction writer; Chekhov's plays are widely seen as close to prose in their narrative quality, their concentration on characterisation and psychology rather than on action. An important part of Friel's plays, like *Faith Healer* (1979) or *Molly Sweeney* (1993), are also based on characters' detailed narratives in the form of a series of monologues, which introduces the narrativising method. Reading Friel's *Three Sisters*, one may notice how frequently the author specifies the scenes with stage directions, much more often than Chekhov does so in the original. In his stage directions Friel sometimes minutely describes even the smaller movements or moods of the characters when saying a particular line. Thus he notes that the Baron's playing the piano is "*heavy and enthusiastic*" and that "*Masha turns away as if to avoid the sound*" (14). "*Solyony crosses the stage with his icy smile, silently miming his duck sounds with his mouth and his left hand*" (19). Once Irina speaks "*cooly*" then "*in awe*;" "*Natasha's accent becomes slightly posh*" when she enters the dining room; "*Roddey speaks with an affected lisps*" (38). At other times Friel's stage directions allow the characters to express their emotions more openly than in the original. He has Vershinin to reach out and hold Masha repeatedly, he even "*goes to her and holds her in his arms,*" which is followed by "*a long kiss*" and Masha's breaking away (49). Andrey is also allowed to take Natasha in his arms, he "*kisses her face and hair and neck*" (41). Interestingly, inherent in these additions is a characteristic of Friel as a dramatist which he also shares with Chekhov: a distrust of directors, and an inclination to keep tight control over the production of his play.

Structural alterations and updating

On a structural level, Friel carried out changes in his translation that transpose the original play into the present of its audience. These alterations include the frequent transformation of statements into questions, the recurrent use of second person singular address and a multitude of question tags, and, most strikingly, making scenes more dialogic by breaking up several of the long monologues into fast paced dialogues. These devices together have the striking effect of turning the original, Chekhovian “dialogues of the deaf,” or false dialogues (when the characters talk more *at* than *to* each other in conversations with no one really listening to anyone else but themselves) into more genuine, seemingly more effective conversational strategies. Irina’s long speech about work, for instance, is turned into a conversation by Chebutikin’s interjections:

IRINA. Dear, darling, dopey Doctor!

CHEBUTIKIN. My own little sweetheart-what is it?

IRINA. You’ll know the answer.

CHEBUTIKIN. The answer to what?

IRINA. Why am I so happy today? I feel-I feel as if I had become
ethereal-as if I were gliding along with the great blue sky [...]

CHEBUTIKIN. You’re my tiny white bird.

IRINA. D’you know what happened to me this morning
just after I’d washed and dressed?

CHEBUTIKIN. Tell me.

IRINA. I had a revelation!

CHEBUTIKIN. Good!

IRINA. Are you listening to me, dopey Doctor?

CHEBUTIKIN. Avidly. What was the revelation? (15)

The pervasive presence of question forms and other syntactic structures that indicate the characters' turning towards each other more intensely also yields a sense of up-to-date, real life communication. Friel often transforms indicative sentences into interrogative ones, frequently employs second person singular address and question tags. While in Chekhov characters simply state what they think, in Friel they turn to each other in a manner that is perhaps more intimate and energetic. For instance, in the original Vershinin concludes his exalted speech about this provincial town with "It's good to live here" (499), in Friel he turns to the girls with a more direct and energetic address: "you don't know how lucky you are" (24). Instead of starting a speech with "I often wonder" (503) he introduces it with a question form addressed to the others: "Did you ever wonder?" (31) In Chekhov, speaking about the director, Kulygin does not worry about keeping his audience's attention, unlike in Friel, with questions like: "Do you know what he said?" (45). Andrey and Baron Tusenbach, too, insistently address their audience with such introductory, second person singular questions: "Do you know where I'd love to be?" (45); or "Did you ever advert to the fact...?" and "Doesn't she...?" (50). The Baron even asks for a reaction when finishing a speech: "Would you agree, Colonel"? (52) The text abounds in alterations that bring about the effect of a more direct, straightforward communication, a sense that the characters are more social, more extrovert than they are in Chekhov.

The frequent use of question tags is another aspect of Friel's version which adds to the above mentioned effect of vivid, apparently real-life-like conversation.

Although question tags constitute a feature specific to the English language and thus the claim that Friel does not follow the original in this respect may seem to be without real basis, the use of them would not be obligatory. The fact that they are a prevalent feature of the characters' speech seems to be due to the author's conscious choice to further enhance the vitality of conversation and the sense that people do talk to one another in an attempt to establish genuine conversation.

On the one hand, such changes lead to the alteration of an essential feature of Chekhov's work by creating a sense of communication where it does not exist in the original; on the other hand, however, they may be seen as serving the aim of adjusting the text to the rhythms of Irish speech patterns, and as another means of introducing a sense of Irishness through verbosity and love of conversation. The significance of talk, of the oral tradition, is often stressed in writings about the culture of Ireland. Kilroy, for instance, remarks that the best Irish fiction is "like a vast anthology of anecdotes, of voices constantly talking and telling" and that Irish culture is "a culture of gossip" (qtd. in Richtarik 98). Richard York formulates the same idea when he describes Ireland as a "verbal country: it is one where speech is esteemed for its ingenuity, self-confidence, originality, for the physical presence it manifests, and for the direct, dynamic human contact it ensures" (176). For their own part, the syntactic and structural alterations illustrated above ensure a more dynamic human contact, which endows the characters of *Three Sisters* with features that approximate them to their Irish audience.

I have argued earlier that Friel does not only carry out a re-appropriation of the play for the Irish theatrical canon, but also makes it part of his own oeuvre. The introduction of Hiberno-English idiom and allusions to Irish cultural and political reality place the play within the system of Irish theatre, whereas the added scenes

together with translational decisions that affect the stylistic as well as the structural elements of the play illustrate how the translated work assumes specific Frielian characteristics.

In one instance, Friel's alteration of the text amounts to editing out the poetic style of Chekhov's language and displacing it with language that reflects his own most immediate concerns. Irina's description of herself in the original can be translated as⁴: "my soul is like an expensive piano which is locked and whose key is lost".⁵ An utterance like this is not only a vehicle to convey shades of meaning but, even more importantly, it represents Chekhov's poetic language which every now and then appears to add unexpected dimensions to the flat prosaic language of everyday life. Friel in his translation eliminates the import of the image when he retains only part of it: Irina yearns for "the magic key, the code, the password..." (109). However, while losing out on Chekhov's style, this particular list of words takes on a special meaning: they constitute a striking reference to a central concern with language and communication in Friel's works, signalling the writer's interest in language and its "complex cultural significances, its manifold realisations, its glories and duplicities" (Peacock xvii).

Whereas Stephen Rea saw Friel's *Three Sisters* as an important political assertion, Friel himself has always been cautious about what he said of the political nature of his plays and has often outright refused to endorse the idea that his plays are political in the least. Just as in the case of *Translations*, of which he once said that "the play has to do with language and only language" (qtd. in Richtarik 35), regarding *Three Sisters* Friel was also "quick to explain that he had not adapted the play, changed it to an Irish setting, or tried to underline specifically Irish meanings" (Richtarik 120). However, his words should be taken with some reservation, because

as a close analysis of his translation strategies have shown above, he did exactly what he denounces. From the very decision to over-write several other existing Standard English translations, as if creating a palimpsest, with the specific and emphasised intention to displace them by his Irish English version, to the palpable alterations in the form of additions and cutting-ups, his particular translation practice results in the enhancing of the original's political meaning and transfers it to the Irish cultural and political context. In this process, the political nature of the act of translation itself becomes visible too.

Friel's *Uncle Vanya*

After having adapted Turgenev's novel, *Fathers and Sons* (1861) in 1987, and the same author's play, *A Month in the Country* (1855) in 1992, Friel returned to Chekhov and composed a "version" of *Uncle Vanya* (1899) in 1998. The time gap between the re-workings of *Uncle Vanya* and *Three Sisters*, two major Chekhov plays, is almost two decades, and although they exhibit very similar techniques of translation (added and expanded lines, the introduction of question tags, questions and dialogues), there are considerable differences too. In *Uncle Vanya* the same devices are more restrained, less numerous and less dominant, and on the whole, the translation follows Chekhov more closely. Indeed, there is an important, striking difference in Friel's approach to translation in the case of *Uncle Vanya*, which suggests a change in not only his attitude to the techniques of translation but also in his perception of the role of translation. In contrast to his *Three Sisters*, which is a result of Hibernicising the play drawing on several existing Standard English translations, *Uncle Vanya* is based on a "literal" translation from the Russian, thus,

significantly, Friel seems to have moved away somewhat from the corrective, re-appropriating postcolonial enterprise that heavily informed the retranslation of *Three Sisters*. However, *Uncle Vanya* also shows the traits of a characteristically domesticating translation therefore it signals merely a step away from his earlier strategy. Political echoes are also present, though they are of a wholly different kind, as they seem to take on a tone of despondency and pessimism. The change in tone might come from a certain amount of disillusionment; Friel says that “*Three Sisters* was an early Field Day production in the days when we were brash with assurance” (“Seven Notes” 180). Two decades later, this assurance, the confident belief in the power of literary methods, drama or pamphleteering, to effect some socio-political change through culture is taken over by a tone of scepticism. In *Uncle Vanya* almost all the alterations convey this disillusionment, as they are all allusions to the still crisis-ridden reality, and especially Northern Irish reality, of contemporary Irish audiences.

Some elements of *Uncle Vanya* Friel translates into more politically charged terms. In Act I in the original, there is merely a marginal mention of an unused, uncultivated patch of land (*pustosh*) that the peasants enquire about, which accordingly is rendered in an explanatory translation by Michael Frayn as a “piece of waste ground” (136). The changes Friel introduced in his version of this scene have the power to raise subtle associations with modern Irish history. In his rendering the word “*pustosh*” is expanded into a theme about “that old squabble about the common ground”, and a “discussion document” (20), which may serve as an allusion “to the endless, fruitless discussion and procrastination associated with the Northern crisis” (Fusco 43). Some images added by Friel can also raise associations with Irish history and reality. Astrof, in his bitterly ironic farewell speech to Elena, sarcastically praises

what can be easily recognised as the Russian counterpart of the Irish Big House: “What’s wrong with here? Forests – lakes – gardens – elegant decay (*the house*) – the atmosphere of sad optimism – *the plantation*, Elena” (75, emphasis in the original). These added lines alluding to the problematic nature of the notion of “home”: “home – or whatever that destination is called” (83) Astrov ponders when he is about to leave home, also evoke a theme that may well ring with familiar echoes for Irish audiences as it seems a recurrent one in Irish literature. Richard Pine, a critic of Friel’s work, singles out “questioning of the concept of home” as one of the playwright’s main thematic preoccupations (Kurdi, “The World” 241).

In other instances Friel alters certain characters in a way that themes resonating with postcolonial issues are introduced. Geraldine Moane in her article titled “A psychological analysis of colonialism in an Irish context” lists suppression of anger and rage, loss/restriction of identity, sense of inferiority and self hatred as the psychological impacts of colonisation (253). In Friel’s version some of these psychological features are foregrounded through the slight alteration of both minor and major characters. Telegin’s, the penniless former landowner’s role is somewhat accentuated, as he is endowed with a farcical obsession in his blind and pathetic admiration of a supposedly superior nation (here the Germans), and especially a German with whom his wife eloped. He is an example of having self-contempt and lacking self-identity. He also provides a comic-farcical parallel to Vanya’s deep self-contempt, which is emphasised by the alteration of the original lines on that topic. In the Frayn translation Vanya complains: “I’m so ashamed! If you knew how ashamed I felt! There’s no pain in the world to compare with these pangs of shame. Unendurable! What can I do? What can I do?” (177), which is easily interpreted as a reference to his guilt about one particular scene, his temporary insanity leading to his

shooting at, and missing, Serebryakov. In Friel his words describe a more general and chronic condition: “I’m so ashamed of myself; so immersed in self-contempt that my whole being is infected with it. If it were just pain, I could handle it. Pain can be measured, can be faced up to. But this malign ghost—it’s slowly killing me. Have you a cure for self-contempt?” (72) Another minor character’s, Maria Voynitsky’s role also becomes more central and comic, becoming a source of bitter irony. She is a fierce reader of political pamphlets (and even imitates to shoot a pamphleteer who is not radical enough), but the fact that in Friel she is half-deaf, and falls asleep while reading those pamphlets makes an ironic comment on the futility of empty political rhetoric. So do Vanya’s added lines: “For fifty long years we have been expressing opinions and reading pamphlets and debating and arguing. [We thought that] the very essence of life could be found in a pamphlet or in a cause or in a political belief. Chaff. [...] Trumpery. Guff. Smoke. The essence of life isn’t there” (19).

It is the change in the ending of the play, however, where Friel most emphatically revitalises Chekhov’s words in the Irish context, provided by the hope for ending violence and for creating a lasting ceasefire as a result of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. In the original Sonya comforts Vanya with a promise of rest (*my otдохnem!*, literally meaning “we will rest!”), which is, accordingly, translated by Frayn as “We shall rest!” (Frayn 187) In contrast, in Friel’s rewriting Sonya promises peace instead of rest, and in the added lines she assures the audience that “all the terrible things we’ve had to endure [...] will be swept away in a great wave of mercy and understanding” (86). Friel’s Sonya repeatedly pleads: “Endure. And peace will come to us” (86). This is where the play culminates in “a contemporary plea for mercy and grace” (Fusco 33), which in the context of the relatively recent break-down of the 1994 ceasefire, and the recent acceptance of the Good Friday Agreement,

amounts to making a “comment upon and encouraging individual strength in the face of the surrounding political malaise” (Fusco 50).

In his discussion of *The Seagull*, Thierry Dubost argues that Irish adaptations of modern classics, like Kilroy’s, “indicate that new cultural perspectives are emerging in Ireland in relation to world drama” (154) through this disconnection. Considering, however, the strategies applied in Kilroy’s adaptation and Friel’s free translations, I would argue that they do not truly constitute an “(opening of) new doors to an extended literary fund, that so far had only been available to Irish people through the frame of English culture,” because these re-workings focus attention not towards the outside, the foreign, the other, but very much toward the inside, the Irish, creating their Other in the process of rewriting, an analogy for their own experience. Their privileging the target culture is not an act of opening up to foreign voices. This can happen only after a cultural self-assertion is felt to have been achieved, in the examples of translations of Chekhov into Irish English, through domestication as a means of re-appropriation.

Chapter Four: Private Projects and Foreign Voices

In this chapter I look at translations and adaptations of Chekhov's works that differ from Friel's and Kilroy's first, Hibernicised rewritings in 1981 in terms of both the rewriting strategies employed and the motivations behind their creation. The plays under discussion here are Friel's recent adaptations made in the 2000s: *The Yalta Game* (2001), *The Bear* (2002) and *Afterplay* (2002); Frank McGuinness' *Uncle Vanya* (1995) and Tom Murphy's *The Cherry Orchard* (2004).

Among the three dramatists, it is Friel whose translations and adaptations of Chekhov form a significant and persistently distinct part of his oeuvre, sharing motifs and techniques with his own "original" plays, and reflecting on the changes both in his artistic interests and the cultural context. By analysing the changes in his approach to adaptation and the techniques he employs, I investigate how his rewritings move from free translation to adaptation, or extreme reworkings of the source play. The changes in technique demonstrate how the underlying motivation for his adaptations has been changing as well. In this chapter I look at the ways in which his approach to reworking Chekhov's works has moved from domestication of Chekhov's major plays (informed by the "cultural project" of the "decolonisation of the imagination") to his remodelling of minor Chekhov works in a way that it reveals abandonment of the re-appropriating trend. His recent rewritings focus on private concerns rather than on the inherently public responsibility to provide Hibernicised classics for the Irish theatrical canon. Thus, in Friel's latest adaptations, *The Yalta Game* (2001), *The Bear* (2001) and *Afterplay* (2002), the emphasis has shifted from the "cultural-political project" towards a more "personal project," as with a change in the rewriting techniques too. There is less emphasis on linguistic and cultural acculturation for the

sake of an Irish audience and no attempt to localise the plays in an Irish context. Indeed, it is significant that Friel's three recent Chekhov rewritings are completely devoid of allusions to any historical context and potential political implications. The translations form a part of Friel's oeuvre, in which Richard Pine observes a very similar change when he says that Friel as a writer moves "into a very much more private sphere, is not writing so much nowadays about public and political matters, he is exploring once again the inner chambers of the heart and the imagination" (Kurdi, "The World" 236).

My contention is that the pattern noticeable in Friel's exceptionally extensive oeuvre of Chekhov translations/adaptations is discernible also in the body of Chekhov rewritings as a whole, by other playwrights. Friel's friend and contemporary, Thomas Kilroy, produced a *Seagull* that was still very much part of the intellectual and aesthetic decolonisation process, while other playwrights' later adaptations or translations of Chekhov lack this inherent political dimension and demonstrate a far less measure of domestication; instead they attempt in various ways to preserve some of the foreignness of the original, or simply use the plays to express concerns of a non-political nature.

Frank McGuinness completed his own translation of *Three Sisters* in 1990, which is given an Irish hue inasmuch as it was done with the three Cusack sisters in mind, yet not a part of a wider Hibernicising endeavour. In an interview he says that unlike Friel and Kilroy, he did not particularly want to set his play on Irish speech patterns (Kurdi, "Interview with McGuinness" 130). Comparing it with the Russian original, one can agree that the text "is a Standard-English version and does not in this respect differ essentially from Frayn's" (Kosok 107). His translation of *Uncle Vanya*, however, displays certain translation techniques that introduce, or rather

preserve, the Russianness of the play and at the same time draw attention to the work's status as a translated text.

Murphy's *The Cherry Orchard* is part of the playwright's intense exploration of the meaning of home, a preoccupation central in his original plays. Although inevitably written in a language that has Irish rhythms and cadences, Murphy makes no emphatic attempt at acculturating the Russian original, in fact, through various foreignising techniques his translation ensures awareness that the play is not deprived of its roots in the Russian culture. Thus, McGuinness' and Murphy's versions of Chekhov approach a state of balance achieved between domestic intelligibility and an accommodation of the otherness of the foreign text in translation.

What prompts the shift away from acculturation serving public projects towards more private concerns and a tendency to retain the foreign element in the source? To a great extent, I argue, it is the changes in the social and cultural contexts that facilitate the emergence of this new approach to the rewriting process. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the issues Friel's and Kilroy's resistant translations/adaptation challenged or set out to defy have lost their relevance for Friel himself in his later career as well as for other writers, not to mention the representatives of a younger generation, who in the present period, often termed as post-nationalist, are more open to foreign voices in theatre. Also, the search for ways to achieve Irish cultural assertion, a central issue even in the last decades of the twentieth century, appears less urgent, or even out of place, in the context of the manifold success of Celtic Tiger Ireland. The advent of a different cultural milieu since the economic boom of the 1990s entails opening up in a general sense towards the international, global context. The economic development is coupled with a new confidence which is manifest as a cultural confidence as well. McGuinness' words with regard to his translations and

versions imply this. He claims that creating versions with foreign voices, for him “is the mark of a new confidence in Irish theatre, that we are not frightened to do that. We no longer need to assert that we have a right to do these plays, we take it for granted, of course we do it” (qtd. in Long, “Frank McGuinness” 306)

Changes in the Concept of Translation

There is a noticeable shift away from domestication in Irish playwrights’ versions of Chekhov, but it is not to say that domestication and acculturation completely ceased to operate in these works. The inevitability of a degree of domestication in any rewriting or translating process cannot be questioned. By definition, the translation/adaptation process aims to make the foreign intelligible for its new audience. However, rendering the foreign intelligible may take different forms, ranging from an emphatic domestication strategy that in effect erases the traces of the source culture and ensures the experience of fluency in the target language text to an approach that finds a balance between the necessary domestication to create intelligibility and the preservation of the foreign to introduce difference to the receiving culture.

An examination of the various translation/adaptation techniques in Friel’s later Chekhov plays, as well as in McGuinness’ *Uncle Vanya* and Murphy’s *The Cherry Orchard*, shows that acculturation is not in itself the central motivation, or a governing aspect in their reworking. Undoubtedly, these plays are also transferred into English as it is spoken in Ireland, but without the pronounced effort and self-consciousness of the earlier translations. As Richard York points out in his discussion of Friel’s *Three Sisters*, there is a whole range of Irish Englishes, from the readily

recognisable Hiberno-English idiomatic constructions (“I’m four years in that second school, amn’t I?”) through obviously Irish English words and phrases (“cejit,” “a quare buck”), to a more pervasive “range of rhythms that is more elusive to define but which most people would recognize as characteristically Irish, rhythms of accumulation and emphasis which are quite different from English brusqueness and self-effacement” (York, “Centre and Periphery” 156). If there is indeed a “common Irish tone” (York, “Centre and Periphery” 157), then this is what characterises the later Chekhov versions by Friel, McGuinness and Murphy, in that they do not display a pronouncedly Hiberno-English idiomatic language, but feature the natural ease of everyday language that happens to be the English as it is spoken in Ireland. What signals these translations’ new trajectory is that there is a preservation of foreign elements of the source text which are then layered on the Irish English base in one set of translations while others differ from their domesticating predecessors in a complete omission of the historical context of the plays, eliminating the possibility of the automatic emergence of Irish concerns.

Friel’s Irishness, McGuinness’ Otherness: Two Irish Versions of *Uncle Vanya*

As it has been argued before, one of the important contexts for the intense rewriting of masters of world literature by Irish playwrights was originally a decidedly political act of resistance to Standard English influence. However, a completely different emphasis can be detected in Friel’s later rewritings, as well as in the retranslation of *Uncle Vanya* by a member of the younger generation, Frank McGuinness. The shift away from the agenda of the earlier trend is present in the case of McGuinness’ translation, which signals a move towards a more relaxed way to embrace

internationality in Irish drama. To illustrate this change in translation and adaptation strategies, a comparison of Friel's and McGuinness' translations of *Uncle Vanya* offers itself.

Although Friel's and McGuinness's respective versions of *Uncle Vanya* are part of the same tradition of intercultural transfer in Irish theatre whereby foreign classics are re-translated by prominent playwrights, they exhibit great differences in the translation and adaptation strategies employed. In fact, they demonstrate two contrasting approaches to translation that dominate much theoretical writing: the domesticating and the foreignizing approaches.

As it has been argued, translation always happens in a context, not in a vacuum. In the case of Friel's *Uncle Vanya*, discussed in the previous chapter, the context that both defines and explains his translation strategies is an engagement with the colonial legacy of Ireland, especially its manifestations in the North, where the Good Friday Agreement had already been signed by the time of the play's performance. Although the Good Friday Agreement had the potential to further the settlement of the Northern Irish problem, Friel's added lines to the Russian original attest to a general scepticism as to what can be achieved through state politics. His translation is still informed by the re-appropriative impulse that manifests itself in the translation strategy of domestication.

McGuinness, a playwright of the younger generation, produced his 1995 translation of *Uncle Vanya*, which, although it was the swan song for the Field Day Theatre Company, demonstrates an important difference in approach. The play is translated into English as it is spoken in Ireland, however, its Hibernicisation is not at all pointed. Instead, there are certain elements transferred from the original to the target text that introduce different voices as well; voices that may very well sound

foreign, strange to an Irish audience. It is the work of a playwright who says in connection with his numerous other versions of classics, that he finds it greatly liberating to work with a multi-cultural cast outside Ireland, with a mixture of accents and voices. McGuinness has reworked not only Chekhov, but a wide range of European theatre classics from Ibsen to Lorca, and with these retranslations and also by creating intertextual links between them and his own works, he attempts, as Eamonn Jordan observes, “to introduce different voices and echoes into Irish drama and to give his plays an open European dialectical consciousness” (120). McGuinness’s version of *Uncle Vanya*, which is at points noticeably foreignised, seems to fit into that project.

Whether the strategy of acculturation or that of foreignisation is favoured in the process of translation is not a result of arbitrary choices. Behind each word the translator chooses, adds or leaves out, and the way she or he places them, there is, as Roman Alvarez and Carmen-Africa Vidal claim, “a voluntary act that reveals his history and the socio-political milieu that surrounds him; in other words, his own culture” (5). I am of the opinion that Friel’s and McGuinness’s differing approaches to theatre translation, in their varying emphasis on acculturation, stem from the way they perceive the present state of theatre in their country and their own role in shaping the Irish cultural landscape.

Although both Friel and McGuinness undeniably created Irish English versions of Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya*, their translations are quite far from each other on the scale of acculturation. At one extreme on that scale there is no attempt whatsoever made “to acculturate the source text that may result in the text being perceived as ‘exotic’ or ‘bizarre’ “ and there is a “middle stage of negotiation and

compromise, and finally [...] the opposite pole of complete acculturation” (Bassnett, “Still Trapped” 93).

Similarly to his *Three Sisters*, Friel’s retranslation of *Uncle Vanya* is a product of linguistic acculturation, it clearly privileges the target language and audience as he produces a Hibernicised and modernised version. He infuses the play with Irishisms, as well as allusions to contemporary Irish reality. As a result, the play becomes Hibernicised and effectively politicised, and thus it is channelled towards new meanings for contemporary Irish audiences. In addition, his assimilation of stylistic aspects from his own plays brought about by numerous additions, cuttings and the altering of linguistic structures, makes it not only a more Irish but a more Frielian play as well. On the whole, he manipulates not just words, but structure and context, and thus the authorship of the translator becomes rather visible.

McGuinness, in contrast, takes quite a few steps into the opposite direction, away from domestication. Instead of a consistent strategy of bringing the original closer to the target audience, he regularly turns towards the source text and source culture, producing a version, which, in line with the Schleiermacher model of translation, respects the strangeness, or otherness of a text, emphasising the importance of—at least to some extent—preserving the “foreignness” of the original in the translation. For one thing, McGuinness follows Chekhov’s text extremely closely, strictly retaining the structure on all levels. Also, in his rendering of such important elements as idiomatic language and terms of address and endearment, he negotiates a foreignness, oscillating between a sense of the native, the familiar and the foreign. He does not conceal the labour of transference from source to target culture. At points, his Chekhov has a voice that sounds alien, unfamiliar to the receiving language, thus

it is not so much the authorship of the translator that becomes visible, but the act and the fact of translation.

The following examples demonstrate what the translation and adaptation strategies applied by the two dramatists are to bring about these effects. As for the linguistic structure, Friel radically alters it by changing, omitting and adding a great deal. For instance, he changes the typically Chekhovian structure of dialogues when he tends to cut up longer speeches into lively, fast paced conversations, repartees. The resulting fast paced, more natural sounding conversations together with the extended lines infuse the play with a sense of Irish verbosity. McGuinness, however, follows the original text almost line by line, leaving the structural features of the original intact.

Chekhov	McGuinness	Friel
<p>ELENA. I was told that you love forests very much. Naturally, it must be awfully useful, but doesn't it hinder your real vocation? Since you're a doctor.</p> <p>ASTROV. Only god knows what our real vocation is.</p> <p>ELENA. And is it interesting?</p> <p>ASTROV. Yes, it is interesting(...).</p> <p>ELENA. You are still a young man, by your look... well, 36-37 years old, and it must be that it is not as interesting as you</p>	<p>ELENA. Yes, I was told you were very keen on forests. I know it's excellent work, but does it not hinder your real vocation? Aren't you a doctor?</p> <p>ASTROV. God alone knows what's our real vocation.</p> <p>ELENA. Is it interesting?</p> <p>ASTROV. The work is interesting (...).</p> <p>ELENA. You're still a young man. Thirty-six, thirty-seven, that's what you look. It cannot be as interesting as you say. Forests everywhere—I</p>	<p>ELENA. Sonya tells me you're passionate about trees.</p> <p>ASTROV. Am I?</p> <p>ELENA. But medicine is your real vocations, isn't it?</p> <p>ASTROV. Is it?</p> <p>ELENA. It interests you more?</p> <p>ASTROV. Medicine?</p> <p>ELENA. Forestry.</p> <p>ASTROV. Maybe. (...)</p> <p>ELENA. It's just that you are a young man—</p> <p>ASTROV. Is thirty seven young?</p> <p>ELENA. All right – you're ancient. But I'd have</p>

say. I think it is
dull/monotonous.
(author's translation)

imagine it must be
monotonous. (12-3)

thought that even at your
time of day there might be
something more exciting
in your life than – sitka
spruce. A government
plantation hasn't exactly
the ring of a fun-fair, has
it? (21-22)

Apart from changing the linguistic structure, some other specific alterations that Friel carried out also create intertextuality between this Chekhov version and his earlier translation of *Three Sisters*, as well as some of his own plays. For instance, he adds the theatrical device of the soliloquy of the split self: in *Uncle Vanya* both Elena and Vanya have their self-addressing monologues.

VANYA. Why didn't you fall in love with her and ask her to marry you? I don't know why you didn't, Vanya. I don't understand that. She would be your wife now [...] you would enfold her in your arms, and you would whisper to her [...]. (35)

ELENA. [...]And listening to you, Elena, I suspect you're not altogether immune yourself. Why are you smiling? Vanya says you have mermaid blood in your veins, doesn't he? [...] you're too cowardly and timid. Even though you know in your heart why he comes here every day now, don't you? Oh, yes, you know very well. So really you should be asking Sonya to forgive you, shouldn't you? (53)

Unlike Friel, whose numerous added lines have the power to raise subtle associations with modern Irish history, McGuinness in his close translation does not carry out any significant additions or omissions. Friel, as described in detail earlier, expands the meaning of the Russian word “*pustosh*”, and places it in a more politicised context for the Irish audience when he talks about “that old squabble about the common ground” and a “discussion document” (20) potentially alluding to the Northern crisis. The word, however, means an uncultivated patch of land, and is rendered by McGuinness in an interpretive translation simply as “a field lying empty” (11).

In transposing texts from one culture to another, the treatment of culture-specific references is bound up with the particular strategy applied. A domesticating translation omits or changes them for domestic analogies, whereas a foreignising method keeps them to mark the difference of the foreign text and culture. One special characteristic of Chekhov’s texts is that they abound in the typically Russian terms of endearment and terms of address which, in general, would sound rather outlandish if rendered into English word by word, because of their high frequency and the way they are used. Friel, in the spirit of domestication, applies the strategy of omission: he does not even attempt to preserve any of these terms, making sure they do not become a hindrance in the flow of natural sounding conversation.

McGuinness, however, instead of resorting to omission, renders visible this cultural difference between the source and the target languages: he transposes the culture specific elements into his version, but hardly ever in idiomatic, natural sounding English phrases. Rather, he tends to opt for close, literal translations. For instance, in his translation, the old servant woman calls her master, the professor, “little lamb” and “my loved one”; Elena, a young enchanting city woman, also

addresses both Vanya and her stepdaughter, Sonya, as “my loved one”; Vanya talks about his dead sister as “my own loved one” and “sister, loved sister,” and in turn, Sonya addresses him as “my loved, good uncle.” Most of these endearments have either a somewhat laboured tone to them in English, or sound colloquial in an exaggerated way. The phrase of address, “my loved one,” for an Irish audience might evoke its Irish equivalent (*a gra, a stor*), which, if noticed, can serve as another, hidden indication that translation is taking place. Preserving the multitude of Russian endearments is an act of acceptance as well as conservation of that cultural difference. Indeed, the decision itself to translate, as opposed to simply eliminating such elements of the original, indicates the translator’s objective to draw attention to the texture of the language of the original work, to convey the flavour of the foreign text, to bring awareness that the play is a translation from another culture.

Similarly, in the case of sayings and idioms, McGuinness’ strategy of negotiating between foreignness and familiarity results in a text that seems at points to deliberately jolt the audience out of their experiencing a transparent, natural sounding English. In his version, familiar Irish constructions alternate with unidiomatic expressions. Irishisms like “that’s the times that are in it” (4), “himself, the professor” (4), “it’s yourself, is it?” (28), “put the heart crossways in us” (78) and “eejit” (75) are side by side with highly stylised phrases, like: “It’s not willed they live here” or “will you close your mouth?” (23); or when the two young women drink to their friendship: “We are as one, you and I?”; or “she sees her grave with one eye, and the other sees a brave new world” (6). Such unidiomatic expressions come from the mirror translation of Russian sayings. Yet another instance when McGuinness opts for the literal translation of the Russian phrase “you’re shaking, you’d think the frost bit you” to describe someone shaking with terror, although this would hardly be

the phrase a native speaker of English would use in a similar situation. Mixing the familiar and foreign seems to be a violation of what Lefevere and Bassnett call “the textual grids” that a culture makes use of, that is, “the collection of acceptable ways in which things can be said” (“Where” 5). The violation of linguistic conventions conveys a sense that the translator is generating a self-consciously odd, estranged, formalized, stylised effect: as if reminding us that it is a work of translation from a foreign tongue and from a hundred years ago.⁶

The different treatment of Russian literary allusions by the two playwrights is also noteworthy. McGuinness preserves all the literary references, not only to Gogol’s *The Government Inspector* and Turgenev’s works, but also to more obscure names, like Batyushkov, Ostrovsky and even translates lines of Russian poems, which, for the Irish, unlike for at least some of a Russian audience, would not carry any associations or meaning; as an effect, they only strengthen the sense of experiencing an exotic, alien culture. Friel, however, in line with his strategies of domestication, completely omits these Russian literary references, the connotations of which would be lost on Irish audiences.

As seen in these examples, Friel’s domesticated, reappropriated version relocates the alien source material within the cultural experience of the new target audience in terms of not only its language but also its thematic resonances. While updating and Hibernicising the language, he restores the play to its original, rougher, more immediate and comic mode, and by introducing subtle allusions to the reality of contemporary Northern Ireland, his achievement is that the play has a special resonance with its Irish audience. Thus, while slanting the culture of origin towards the receiving culture, he manages to do what Michael Cronin sees as a task of the

translator “to do interpretative and aesthetic justice to the source text” (185) as well as to reflect on issues relevant to his audience.

McGuinness, with his strategy of making the text oscillate between the familiar and the foreign, creates a language that is not quite transparent, which hints at its being a translated language, which, according to George Steiner, has the status “of unhousedness, of elucidative strangeness” (qtd. in Jordan 95). By conveying some of the otherness of the original, having his Chekhov speak with a voice that is different, other, McGuinness’s version illustrates that in terms of his translations of classics, there is a breaking away from that trend of Irish “cultural imperialism,” or cultural colonisation, benign or not, which tends to represent the Russian experience as a double to the Irish one. Instead, he restores some of the foreignness and otherness of Chekhov’s world, which might as well indicate that the need for re-appropriating foreign classics is now felt a lot less urgently by Irish dramatists. It may also demonstrate an opening to a larger scale of other voices in Irish theatre, which instead of defining itself in opposition to the English influence, now conceives of itself as part of a global, multicultural world.

Tom Murphy: Keeping *The Cherry Orchard* in Russia

Tom Murphy completed his version of Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* in 2004, thus joining the list of re-writers, re-translators and adaptors of Russian classics. His translation, the most recent exercise in reworking Chekhov, is akin to McGuinness’ *Uncle Vanya* in that it also lacks a pronounced intention to translate the Russian play into an explicitly Irish context. Murphy’s achievement in his version of *The Cherry Orchard* is that the play enables its audience to reflect on their own predicament

without being radically domesticated. The play, in fact, closely follows the original text. Unlike Friel, who in his first two Chekhov plays introduces additions in order to bring out the Russian-Irish parallel, Murphy remains close to the text. There is no urgent need for alterations to emphasise analogies since parallels stand out even in a rather close translation of the original.

His choice of this particular play is perhaps not surprising, as his original play, *The House* (2000) contains thematic echoes of *The Cherry Orchard* with its focus on the decline of the old land owning classes and its concern with changes in lives arrested in the past. As Csilla Bertha notes “At the beginning of the play one can almost hear Chekhov’s axes felling the trees in the orchard and see the quietly decaying world of the three (de Burca) sisters” (216). Although it is true, as Bertha remarks, that Murphy’s world is different from Chekhov’s, and *The House* dramatises mid-twentieth century Irish historical and social reality (Bertha 215), there are certainly strong resemblances of Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* in the Murphy play. The main character, Christy, is from the underclass like Lopakhin, and his obsessive bond to Mrs de Burca, owner of a Big House, and a mother substitute for him, recalls Lopakhin’s devotion to Ranyevskaya, similarly rooted in childhood experience. In fact, Christy’s relationship to the mother and one of her daughters, that is, the unrealised latent attraction between him and Marie, resembles very closely the emotional tensions of the trio of Lopakhin, Varya and Ranyevskaya. When the Big House is for sale, Christy, like Lopakhin, is intent on buying it, which entails a series of destruction, not of the estate, as in *The Cherry Orchard*, but of human lives.

Another possible motivation for Murphy’s choice of this Chekhov play is provided by the theme of finding and losing home, which Murphy identifies as a central theme not only in Irish literature in general, but in his own plays as well. With

regard to his own works he says: “In recent times I noticed that the recurring theme seems to be the search for home. What that ‘home’ means, I am not sure. [...] Now, I see it more as a search for the self, for peace, for harmony” (Kurdi, “Interview with Murphy” 234).

Murphy’s *The Cherry Orchard*, like McGuinness’ *Uncle Vanya*, is a departure from the earlier domesticating Chekhov rewritings. The translational strategies both Murphy and McGuinness employ in their versions of Chekhov indicate a turning away from advocating domestication, and, instead, both texts find ways to mark the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text. Thus it is precisely the wholesale domestication that these translations resist, although perhaps more subtly than obviously. Because its aim is to make the foreign intelligible, a translation, by definition, cannot risk total unintelligibility by experiments of extreme foreignisation of phonetics, syntax, vocabulary. Unavoidably, there needs to be a domesticated base. The language of McGuinness’ and Murphy’s Chekhov plays is, therefore, that of the dominant discourse of their country, English as it is spoken in Ireland, “a common Irish tone” (York, “Centre and Periphery” 157). Clearly, no matter how important it is for the translator to register the otherness of the source text, “otherness can never be manifested in its own terms, only in those of the target language” (Venuti, *Invisibility* 20). The specific target language discourse constructed by a translator can, however, function as a site of refusing complete domestication, and become infused, to varying degrees, with foreign effects.

Foreignizing translation employs various techniques that introduce obstruction of, or at least interference with, fluency and transparency of language so as to prohibit the illusion that the foreign text in front of the reader is not a translated one, but is “natural,” and in fact masquerades as the “original” in the target language. Murphy,

similarly to McGuinness, effected foreignisation on the lexical level in his rendering Russian forms of address, idiomatic constructions or culture specific elements visible/audible for his Irish audiences.

Venuti's use of Phillip Lewis's concept of "abusive fidelity" can be helpful when discussing Murphy's and McGuinness's versions. "Abusive fidelity" in translation "acknowledges the abusive equivocal relationship between the translation and the foreign text and eschews a fluent strategy in order to reproduce in the translation whatever features of the foreign text abuse or resist dominant cultural values in the source language" (qtd. in Venuti, *Invisibility* 24). In Lewis's words, it results in a "translation that values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match the polyvalencies of plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing its own" (qtd. in Venuti, *Invisibility* 24). The description fits these two versions of Chekhov: even though they inevitably enact their own "ethnocentric violence" on the foreign text, to some extent they both challenge the target language tradition and culture by exposing their audience to the difference inherent in the foreign text as well as by drawing attention to its being a translation. In Murphy, updating the language in the Irish dialect of English, making it sound colloquial and fragmented ensures a basic fluency, but on the level of culture-specific vocabulary the Russianness is emphasised. The same is true for McGuinness's *Uncle Vanya*, but this author goes one step further in his attempt to endow the translation with a foreign effect: his decision to often literally translate idiomatic language makes the texture of the discourse alien, disconcerting, hindering the illusion of fluency and transparency of Chekhov in English, or to be precise, in Irish English.

Interestingly, the trend of domesticating Chekhov into an Irish context has become so established in public perception that now if an Irish playwright deals with

Chekhov, the presumption, or even the expectation is that he or she produces a version which is meant to reflect on Irish historical, social or cultural issues. Murphy's *The Cherry Orchard* at first glance seems to be a complete appropriation of the work, or indeed his own *The Cherry Orchard* since, curiously enough, on the play's front cover Chekhov's name does not even deserve a mention. On the back cover, his version is praised for being a "fine adaptation with its Irish vernacular (which) allows us to re-imagine the events of the play in the last days of Anglo-Irish colonialism, giving *The Cherry Orchard* a vivid new life within our own history and social consciousness." However, having looked closely at the two texts involved, i.e. the Russian original and its version by Murphy, and having made a thorough analysis of the translation techniques Murphy employed, one finds that the back cover blurb turns out to be a highly inappropriate summing up of the nature and effects of Murphy's reworking of the play. The words "adaptation" and "Irish vernacular" suggest much wider implications than the textual reality of the version allows. My claim is that Murphy's reworking, though undoubtedly an Irish English version, is one that represents a move away from the late twentieth-century Irish trend to thoroughly acculturate and domesticate the original. In contrast, it allows space to the Russianness, the otherness of Chekhov's play.

As for Murphy's use of the Irish vernacular, it must be noted that around 2004, when the play was published, and after an already well established trend of Irishing Chekhov's plays, for an Irish writer to work in Irish English and not Standard English already seems to be more of a natural choice than a politically loaded one. In any way, Murphy's language use is not even a conspicuously Hibernicised one, there is no sense of deliberate Irishing, no emphatic or overwhelming use of Irish English. There is not a multitude of explicitly Irish phrases or idioms like in Friel's or Kilroy's

pioneering adaptations of Chekhov, where Irish English idiomatic language lends a conspicuous characteristic to the plays. Indeed, the sentence “have you no fear of God, are you ever going to bed?!” (27) stands out as an exception that is strikingly Irish on the ears. Another example of those few lexical items that raise associations with Irish reality is when Lopakhin says of Gayev: “... he calls me a boor, a grabber, a jumped-up bumpkin. Water off my back ...” (16) where “grabber” for the Irish ear might ring a bell and may be associated with “land grabber,” a notorious figure in Irish history. These instances of Irish English, to emphasize it once more, are not examples of an array of Irish idioms, but occasional ones in an otherwise rather smooth text, which, one might even claim, is close to Standard English.

The claim that this version allows the Irish to re-imagine the events of the play in the last days of Anglo-Irish colonialism, giving *The Cherry Orchard* a vivid new life within their own history and social consciousness seems to be an attempt to put the new version on the already successful bandwagon of Hibernicising adaptations, or else it indicates the persistence of the idea that Russia functions a proxy for Ireland without being granted a chance to expose Irish audiences to its otherness. Which is not to say that this sort of simplifying description should be unexpected in an introduction on the back cover. Still, it is symptomatic of the extent to which Irish readers and audiences are conditioned by the earlier adaptations to uncritically see Russia as a counterpart for Ireland. Beyond doubt, Murphy’s *The Cherry Orchard* does allow such re-imagination of the events in terms of the Anglo-Irish colonial past, but only inasmuch as a proper translation would, similarly to Murphy’s version, which is in fact very close to the original text. It is not any specific intervention on the part of the translator/rewriter that enhances the parallels; they stem from the similarity between the realities of Chekhov’s Russia and nineteenth-century Ireland discussed

earlier. Petya's famous "All of Russia is our orchard" speech in Act Two ends with lines that might as well ring with Irish relevance for those who search for it. A possible translation of his speech would be: "We are at least twenty years behind our times, we don't have anything yet, no clear attitude to the past, we can only philosophize, complain about despondency or drink vodka. But it is so obvious that in order to start living in the present we have to start to atone for our past, to get over it, but it is only through suffering, only through working ceaselessly and especially hard that we can atone for it." In Murphy's translation the same character says, "We haven't come very far. We have nothing yet. No *conscious* attitude to the past. Theories, melancholy and vodka. And to live in the present, the past has to be consciously acknowledged, and atoned for by suffering and work. ..." (43). An Irish audience might interpret these lines within their social consciousness as a reference perhaps to the Northern Irish situation, or in fact, in a wider sense, as an allusion to Ireland's obsession with her past and the acknowledged need to come to terms with its legacy. Murphy's, however, is a very close translation of the original speech as far as the meaning of the words is concerned, so the sense conveyed in these lines derives strictly from the original. It is only the syntactic structure that has been changed in that Chekhov's fully grammatical, long sentences are broken up into shorter, elliptic ones, which is one means of updating the language and a general tendency noticeable in Murphy's version.

Another feature of the original play preserved in the version might, quite paradoxically, be also mistakenly considered to be a consequence of Hibernicising the text. The original is full of various, typical Russian expressions featuring God, and other religious phrases which Murphy neither cuts out, nor translates literally. The former would make the text sound fluent English, the latter too outlandishly foreign.

(Translating them literally, and thus often distorting meaning and character, was one of the weaknesses of some earlier British English translations). Murphy provides the corresponding English phrases in the given context: “*bog s nim sovsem*” is translated as “Bless him” (12); “*Gospod s toboi*” as “God bless you” (15); “*Tsarstvo ei nebesnoie*” as “God rest her” (16). Many English translations and versions fail to reproduce these phrases without distorting their meaning or the characters saying them, like Griffiths in one instance when he “has Varya down on her knees, kiss the crucifix she is wearing (!), and pronounce “God is with you, Mama” (Ryapolova, 226)” making her sound far too eccentric and outlandish for British audiences; in reality, Varya does not fall into a religious frenzy, but simply warns her stepmother, Ranyevskaya not to say foolish things. So Varya’s words in the original, “*Gospod s vami, mamochka*” are “her reaction to Ranyevskaya ‘seeing’ her dead mother in the orchard, and mean ‘what are you saying mother’, ‘come to your senses’, ‘it’s impossible’, ‘you’re seeing things’, and so forth” (Ryapolova 226). Murphy’s translation of the phrase as “Bless us mamochka, don’t!” (23) comes close to the original meaning.

Although the regular occurrences of these phrases in the play surely have a potential to produce an Irish feel to it because the frequent use of religious expressions are familiar elements of Irish culture, it is, again, merely a characteristic of the original text, preserved “faithfully” in translation. Thus, most of the elements in Murphy’s version that might superficially be judged as enhancing the Irishness of the play are, in fact, the result of his following the text relatively closely. In other words, the Irishness an audience might perceive does not originate from a domesticating strategy.

On the scale of rewriting, the text is closer to being a translation than an adaptation, even given that defining adaptation is highly problematic. In any event, one could argue that adaptations, more often than not, “openly declare themselves as an interpretation or re-reading of a canonical precursor” (Sanders 2), which, as Sanders goes on in her description, tend to involve directors’ personal vision, cultural relocation or updating of some form, movement into a new generic mode or context. This version does not exhibit any radical shifts away from the original. Although Murphy in his introduction says that he has “not followed the literal translation line by line or speech by speech” (n.p.), he is rather close to doing so. There are no significant changes in the play’s structure and hardly any instances of editing out or adding to the original text. The ones that do occur are well within the sphere of normal translation practice which aims at reproducing the sense and the impact of the original for a target audience. Such a reproduction entails that in the translation process the translator often has to adapt the source text substantially if he or she aims at achieving “functional equivalence,” i.e., making “the target text function in the target culture the way the source text functioned in the source culture” (Lefevere, Bassnett, “Proust’s” 8). Something very similar happens in Murphy’s version in spite of his resisting to carry out complete domestication.

In his introduction, Murphy discusses the distinction between translation and version. Having acknowledged the two literal translations he worked from, he describes the difference between the roles, as he sees them, of a literal translation and a version.

The objective of a literal translation – to render in another language the exact contextual meaning of the original – differs from the purpose of

a version. A version, as I see it, is more subjective and more interpretatively open; it is speculative in its considerations of the ‘spirit’ of the original and seeks to translate that ‘spirit’ into a language and movement that have their own dynamic; the ordering in the version attempts to re-create what was alive, musical and vibrant in the original. A version, of itself, wants to avoid looking like the back of the tapestry. (n. p.)

These two distinctive activities, i.e., to produce a literal translation of the exact contextual meaning and to translate the “spirit” of the original into a text that re-creates the original’s vitality and musicality in a more subjective and interpretative way, would sound very much like two steps in the regular translation process for those who have ever been engaged in making translations from one language into another. Translators do not come up with their actual version immediately after reading the original, but make a mental “literal” translation first and then turn it into a functional equivalent, usually trying to preserve the “spirit” while transposing the source text into the different dynamic of a different language. Murphy, having no knowledge of Russian, relies on someone else doing the first step for him, and carries out the second, undoubtedly more creative, step himself using his own, subjective translation strategy. And what his overall strategy amounts to is not a thorough domestication of the text, even if it might seem so due to those above discussed features of the original Russian play that can raise associations with Irish reality in their own right. Instead of acculturating the original, his version does not deny the Russianness of the play, on the contrary, the Russianness is emphasised by preserving the play’s otherness.

To see how this otherness is allowed a strong presence in Murphy's version, we should consider some of the culture-specific elements in the original text and see how the writer deals with them. Such an analysis will show clearly that the domesticating urge is checked and balanced by the many instances of foreignising translation strategies. A typical feature of Chekhov's texts is that they abound in Russian terms of endearments and this linguistic feature is felt to support the stereotypical view that the Russians are more emotionally explicit than speakers of English. Unlike English speakers, a Russian audience would not find anything amiss hearing servants addressing their masters with such phrases as "little lamb" and "my loved one" in McGuinness's foreignising translation of *Uncle Vanya*, where the old servant woman calls the professor this way. Therefore, a domesticating translation in an attempt to ensure a natural sounding language for their target audience would strictly omit these elements foreign to English ears and customs. Another translational choice is to challenge fluency, and carry these features over into the translation creating a foreignising effect. It is the latter that both McGuinness and Murphy opted for when they kept all the terms and endearments, the latter writer even adding a few. One of the many instances of Murphy translating such phrases is when Dunyasha, a young housemaid calls Anya, the daughter of her employer, "*milaia maia, radost' maia, svetik*" (literally: my dear, my pleasure, little light), which is translated as "my little darling," "pet," "my little flower" (9). Instead of toning down this Russian characteristic, Murphy emphasises it by adding more than there is in the original: the single word "*rodnaia*" is expanded into "my pet, my love, my darling little sister, my ..." (28); Pishchik addresses Lopakhin "my dearest heart" (71) instead of a phrase in the original that means "man of the greatest intellect"; and Murphy even makes up a phrase: "mamochkamine" (24). This general preservation and even

enhancement of the strong emotionality of the play's language is again detected in Murphy's translating the line "*milaia maja, prekrasnaia komnata*" (literally: my darling, beautiful room") into "sweet, darling, beautiful, *angel* of a room" (9, emphasis in original). The typical Russian diminutive forms of first names fall into the same league as the endearments and are treated similarly: all the numerous instances of the girls' calling Ranyevskaya "Mamochka" are preserved, just as the diminutives "Petya" or "Anyechka."

Another Russian feature that traditionally was rendered invisible by domesticating English translations is the Russian way of addressing people by both first name and patronym remains also unchanged in Murphy's version. Characters addressing each other as Lyubov Andreyevna (16), Peter Sergeich, (10), Boris Borisovich (20), Leonid Andreich (27) or Avdotya Fyodorovna (31) will definitely be recognised as foreign by his Irish audiences, which to some extent works towards preventing an automatic identification of Russian reality with the Irish one. The rendering of realia and idiomatic language is not consistent, some culture specific-elements are preserved in verbatim translation, others are translated by their corresponding English versions. "*Kvass*" features in the stage directions only, but the original's simple "encyclopaedia" turns into *Encyclopaedia Russica* (17). Most of the idiomatic phrases are rendered by their corresponding English phrases creating a contemporary feel ("Time to call it a day" [13]; "Head over heels, I am..." [16]; etc.), except for the verbatim translation of the Russian saying "It will get better before you are married" (5), which in Russian is said when comforting a crying, injured child, and which would thus be closer to "be a brave boy" in contemporary English. However, as its meaning is perfectly transparent in the given context, both its foreignness and idiomatic nature are lost.

Naturally, though, in his subjective treatment of the original to give it a new life, Murphy makes alterations to it. These alterations affect the linguistic structure on the level of sentences by way of changing statements into questions and turning grammatically complete sentences into elliptical ones. These changes have the effect of updating, modernising the play by approximating its language to the potential expectations of twenty-first century audiences, for whom a straightforward translation of Chekhov's full grammatical sentences in the characters' conversations may very well sound somewhat outdated. The fragmentation resulting also from Murphy's turning statements into hypothetical questions without requiring an answer makes the characters and their way of speaking sound more realistic in a modern sense. Instead of stating things, they pose questions as if wondering, as if their inner thoughts were not expressed but only to be guessed at, which leaves room for the audience to wonder along with the characters. Lophakhin before Ranyevskaya's arrival says in the Russian text: "Lyubov Andreyevna has lived for five years abroad, I don't know what she has become like... She is a good person," etc. In Murphy: "What will she be like after her five years abroad? She won't have changed... The eyes, you know: the kindness in them. Always ..." (5). More questions, more gaps, more suggestiveness. Also, when in the original Pishchik says: "*Dochka maia, Dashenka, vam klanetsa*" (literally meaning: My Daughter, Dashenyka, sends her regards) Murphy has him say: "Dashenka? My daughter? ... Sends her regards" (16), which, too, suggests a subtext of humbly asking whether Ranyevskaya remembers her.

The above mentioned examples could also illustrate the most conspicuous structural change Murphy effected in his version, i.e. the breaking down of complete grammatical sentences into shorter, elliptical ones. This is a way of avoiding the often too explicit spelling out of facts already known for the characters in order to inform

the audience, which again is a rather artificial and outdated method of introducing information. The very first sentence/utterance in Murphy's play is: "Well, it's in" (5), the referent of which becomes clarified only in the following exchanges: "... What time it is?" "Nearly two". "So how late does that make the train?" (5). In the original the first line states "the train has arrived." Elliptical sentences become a characteristic feature, the characters in Murphy's play regularly converse in half sentences while the rest of the meaning is indicated in the stage directions, left to be expressed by the actors' gestures, etc. For instance, the complete Russian sentence, "*Esli bi ia magla zabyt' maio proshloe*" (literally: If only I could forget my past, is rendered as "If only I too could forget (... *the past*)" (20); or the sentence "*Eto tak poshlo, prostit'e*" (Literally: this is so vulgar!) turns into "But cottages, 'bungalows' (*The vulgarity of the idea*)" (34), and finally: "I'm going to! (*Scream*)" (34) and "Mama" (*meaning "Mama bought it"*, emphasis in original) (16).

Another re-translator of *The Cherry Orchard*, Trevor Griffiths convincingly explains the need for such alterations of the original text when keeping in mind the contemporary target audience it is produced for. After complaining that "the language of several existing translations seemed curiously old-fashioned and outmoded" he goes on describing the reason behind his own decision to update it.

I did want to translate the play into a language, and idiom that was recognizably of our time. The first act poses a number of problems for the translator. The writing is often highly expository: characters tell each other things they all know already, in order that the audience will gain a firm biographical picture of character, relationships, history. This method of introducing information now seems dated. There is a

history of realism that spans some eighty years beyond Chekhov: a realism of the stage, but also a realism of film. The craft of realism, of shaping realist texts, has advance in some ways beyond what Chekhov was able to achieve –particularly in levels of obliqueness (qtd. in Allen, “The Cherry” 161).

Similar motives and intentions are discernible behind Murphy’s frequent resorting to the use of elliptical sentences, but he is less radical in editing out expository speeches than Griffiths, who drastically cuts a great number of lines to achieve a more suggestive and oblique, and thus more modern effect. He defends such cuts (specifically the one altering the last exchange between Gayev and Ranyevskaya, where the whole conversation is cut out with the exception of one word) in very Chekhovian terms. “To say less at this point is, I believe, to allow an English audience to feel more: to feel the depth and scale of the severing. ... I like the idea of suggesting the deepest feelings by the slightest of movements, the tiniest of utterances” (Allen, “The Cherry” 165). This attitude is absolutely Chekhovian, Chekhov himself wrote in connection with short fiction (but his ideas could be applied to any type of literary work) “it is better to say not enough than to say too much” in other words: a writer “must show more than he tells, hint rather than explain” (qtd. in Shaw, 47).

Along with his cuttings and rearranging sentence structure, Murphy also added a few of his own lines to the original text, and although they are insignificant in number, whether they are necessary is arguable, because they merely function as means to make the otherwise clear meanings of the play even more explicit, or to enhance characterisation. Lyubov says in Murphy that her sin is “Squandering my

inheritance” (34), which is completely clear without making her spelling it out, while Lopakhin is also given an additional line: “But you know the place is going to be sold, you know that, don’t you?” (17), when his advice to save the orchard falls on deaf ears. These lines may add to characterisation, as well as carry the dramatist translator’s interpretation, because they emphasise that Lopakhin is desperate to make his voice heard and save the family from destruction, so he is not to be taken for the villain of the play. Nevertheless, in general the added lines, unlike in Friel’s *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*, do not introduce specifically Irish concerns, political, social or cultural, to the play.

Notwithstanding the linguistic modernisation and the text’s moving towards to the target audience (which is in fact a domesticating process), the play’s cultural origin is not erased, rather, when compared to earlier English language translations, it is regained by retaining features that signal Russianness. The play allows the audience to register the foreign and thus stages a kind of opposition towards the earlier Irish domesticating trend, with a view to ensuring more internationality, more openness to foreign voices and perhaps to acknowledge more explicitly foreign literary influence.

Brian Friel’s shift from public to private: *The Bear*, *The Yalta Game*, *Afterplay*

In recent years Friel has once again returned to rewriting Chekhov, but his latest reworkings exhibit certain important changes in treatment and approach compared with his *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*. The most conspicuous feature of the three new plays is that “the cultural project” of intellectual and artistic decolonisation, so dominant and essential in *Three Sisters*, his first, and also clearly traceable in *Uncle Vanya*, his second Chekhov adaptation, gives way to a more “personal project” in

terms of both adaptation technique and artistic concerns. In his *Uncle Vanya* (1998) one character castigates himself for thinking that “the very essence of life could be found in a pamphlet or in a cause or in a political belief. Chaff. [...] Trumpery. Guff. Smoke. The essence of life isn’t there” (19). His recent adaptations demonstrate that in Friel’s later career the essence of life is to be searched for outside the realm of social responsibility, in the sphere of private spaces of the human experience.

In his recent adaptations, Friel immerses himself in the Chekhovian world, going beyond the major plays and dipping into works representing the diversity of the genres Chekhov deployed. *The Yalta Game* (2001) is based on a Chekhov short story, *The Lady with the Lapdog* (1899). *The Bear* (2002) is a revitalisation of a 1888 Chekhov vaudeville. Finally, his most recent work based on Chekhov, *Afterplay* (2002), represents the extremes of adaptation, because it revives two characters from two different plays, Sonya, from *Uncle Vanya*, and Andrey from *Three Sisters*, and places them into a new play. These adaptations, even more obviously than the first translations, are created in a labour of love and result in more intimate, personal works. Talking about Friel’s earlier adaptations, Richard Pine argues that the “Russian plays explore varieties of love” (*Brian Friel* 330). This is much more conspicuously true of the three later adaptations, where the political undertone is completely lacking, and, instead, more personal concerns are examined. Ideas that are of mutual interest for Friel and Chekhov re-emerge in them, such as the theme of living “lives based on selected fictions” (Pine, “Review” 192). Characters in both Chekhov and Friel tend to indulge in self-dramatisation, inventing themselves and each other; unable to live in the present. They escape into private worlds, looking back or forward, waiting for a real, happy life that is yet to come. The three Friel works under consideration explore such aspects of the private world of human

experience without taking too much account of the world outside. As rewritings, they represent Friel's turning inwards and away from the issues of public responsibility and social engagement. Whereas the Russia of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* represented in some ways Friel's homeland, in these later plays he completely omits the Russian historical context and consequently the potential for the Irish cultural analogies as well. Thus the political motivations underscoring Friel's earlier adaptations seem to be lacking. However, as Vera Gottlieb claims with regard to the productions of Chekhov's plays, that theatre has always been political, "by omission if not by commission" ("The dwindling scale" 147). Friel's focus on private concerns instead of the earlier, more explicitly public concerns inherent in his translations of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*, signals a change in his political attitude towards perhaps a general disillusionment.

Many of the devices Friel applied in his earlier translations, however, are present in *The Bear*, *The Yalta Game* and *Afterplay*. He accelerates the pace by making the dialogues brisker, cuts up longer speeches into more naturalistic dialogues. He updates language by infusing it with more explicit eroticism and enhanced comedy and by making speeches more colloquial. Although the adaptation techniques in these plays enact a necessary measure of domestication by way of updating the language and thus approximate the works for their twenty-first century audiences, they do not appear to have a function reaching beyond that.

Friel's adaptation of *The Bear*, Chekhov's vaudeville exhibits most of the above features. It includes alterations mainly on the level of vocabulary and syntax, by which he achieves a bridging of the century-wide gap: the dialogues are made livelier, more vibrant and up-to-date. In one scene, for instance, when the widow accepts Smirnov's, the boorish neighbour's challenge to a duel, Friel has Smirnov

show her how to hold a gun by embracing her from behind. Their dialogue during this scene, cut up into faster exchanges in Friel's version, further emphasises the erotic tension.

ELENA. Like this?

SMIRNOV. Well done. That's called cocking the gun. Now you aim it – like this. A little higher. Good. And hold your head back a little. Little more. *His face is now buried in her hair.* (Softly) Jesus Christ!

ELENA. Sorry?

SMIRNOV. Perfect – beautiful. Now stretch your arm full length – that's it –

Pause, as he gazes at the back of her head.

ELENA. Well?

SMIRNOV. Wonderful. Now pull back the hammer.

ELENA. I've done that.

SMIRNOV. Have you? So you have. (60)

Friel's choice of this seemingly minor, light-hearted one-act play can be appreciated if we take a closer look at the original, which is in fact a subtle subversion of the genre of the vaudeville, a short, light and piquant theatrical piece, usually a comedy, whose dialogue intermingles with light, satirical songs. Chekhov himself dismissed it as a "joke in one act" and Fintan O'Toole, reviewing Friel's version of it, hastily dismisses the play too, reminding us of Chekhov's own remark. O'Toole contends that "sometimes, it is well to remember, long forgotten trial pieces by young geniuses were forgotten for good reasons" ("Two Plays After" n. p.). However, Vera

Gottlieb warns us not to take the author's self-deprecation too seriously, arguing that the one-act plays constitute "a major and serious part of Chekhov's achievement" ("Chekhov's one-act plays" 57) since in the writing process Chekhov revised them as scrupulously as the major plays. In Chekhov's original, tension arises from the characters themselves, and not from the conventional, stock elements of obstacles or intrigues, and farce never really detracts from psychological validity. Observing all this, Friel introduced alterations that also work towards the underlying psychological credibility of character. The ending for instance is slightly changed by Friel's additions. In his version, the widow, Elena, realises that her playing a role is self-deceptive, and also destructive of her youth, her beauty: "You're right. I'm becoming a shrew – a bitter, soured old...Tartar. It's showing in my face. Look. [...] Good Christ, what an awful bloody mess I'm in!" (64). These introspective lines would be out-of-place in a conventional vaudeville, but are in accordance with Chekhov's intention to give a deeper psychological account for Elena's eventual acceptance of Gregory's proposal. The characters' actions in the play can be looked at as the comic treatment of a recurring theme of Friel's plays, namely that people tend to live their lives according to the fictions they construct, as, for instance, in *Faith Healer* (1979), Grace says of her life with her husband, Frank: "I'm one of his fictions too" (353). In *The Bear*, both characters strive to live up to their own fictions of themselves. They play roles, Gregory over-acts his role of a boorish man, Elena that of the sentimental grieving widow, and this role-play is later comically subverted by a sudden change, when she assumes fierce masculinity, and he is turned into a sentimental lover.

Friel's 2001 adaptation of Chekhov's short story, *The Lady with the Lapdog* (1899), arguably yields a more substantial play, *The Yalta Game*, which is at the same time a significant achievement of translation between genres. The germ of the idea of

reworking this story existed already in 1992, when Friel asked himself the question in his sporadic diary: “Why does *The Lady with the Lapdog* keep coming back to me?” (“Sporadic” 153) But instead of working on it he chose to write *Molly Sweeney* (1993). The simultaneous presence of the two ideas might have led to the congeniality of the two plays in terms of structure and theme in that they are both versions of monologue plays and deal with lives lived on the borderline created by fantasy and reality. Interestingly, *The Lady with the Lapdog* resembles Chekhov’s plays structurally, in that it consists of four parts that capture the changing stages of the love relationship. Friel’s dramatic adaptation, in turn, refers back to its originating prose fiction in transforming the short story only partially into a dramatic dialogue, retaining the role of the narrative voice. Although the characters in the play do engage in actual conversations, essential parts of the dramatic action are not acted out in dialogues but narrated by the two characters in a sequence of interior monologues. This technique places *The Yalta Game* among Friel’s monologue plays, like *Molly Sweeney* and *Faith Healer*. Similarly, the theatrical device of the split self shaping this adaptation fits it with other Friel plays as well. First used in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* this strategy re-emerges in almost all the adapted plays in the form of the discourse of the split self. In *Three Sisters* Friel has the incompetent doctor, Chebutykin, address his reflection in the mirror, and in his version of *Uncle Vanya* both Elena and Vanya have similar moments. This technique is used most emphatically in *The Yalta Game*, where the playwright establishes the convention that we hear both the characters’ actual dialogues, highlighted by being printed in bold in the text, and their internal monologues, unheard by the other, commenting on the their feelings and the events. The split between the public and private selves of the

characters is a pervasive structuring element taken through the whole play, but it also contributes greatly to the dramatic tension:

ANNA. **No, I don't just love you – I worship you. Oh, Dmitry, my darling, you will love me always, won't you?**

GUROV. She believed she did worship me. She believed she would always worship me. And for the first time I had come close to worshipping somebody too. But how could I tell her that this would come to an end one day? Indeed it would. But if I had told her, she wouldn't have believed me.

ANNA. **You will love me always, Dmitriy?**

GUROV. **Yes.**

ANNA. **And I will love you always.**

GUROV. **I know that.** (35, emphasis in the original)

This powerful one-act play, through the development of an illicit love affair, dramatises the elusive quality of reality and truth. Here, although from a different angle, we see again lives that find some kind of home in a borderline country, as it happens in *Molly Sweeney*, where “real—imagined—fact—fiction—fantasy—reality there it seems to be” (67) intermingle and create a liveable world, this time for the lovers. Both Anna and Gurov describe this emotional and mental state. Anna: “It was a strange kind of living; knowing with an aching clarity that I would never see him again – ever; and at the same time being with him always, always, happily always in that ethereal presence” (29). About his actual, real life and the memories of his love affair, Gurov

says: “suddenly, for no reason that I was aware of, things that once seemed real, now became imagined things. And what was imagined, what I could imagine, what I could recall, that was actual, the only actuality” (30).

The theme of living life based on selected fictions is further developed by Friel’s addition to the original action in the form of the eponymous Yalta game. Gurov plays the game of speculating about the lives of other visitors, in his words: “investing the lives of others with an imagined life” (14).

Friel’s preoccupation with language as a means of transfiguration, transformation, and re-invention of the self is present in *The Yalta Game* not only on the obvious plane of the work itself being a re-invention, a transformation of one genre into another. It is also captured on the level of action, where the fantasy world of a holiday romance and its memory transform for the characters into something more real than their actual lives. Reality becomes irrelevant, and the imagined becomes reality. The two lovers live their actual lives waiting for the real life that is yet to come. In their preoccupation with a possible, ideal, eternal future there is a reverberation of the ill-fated lovers’ question in *Translations*: “What is that word ‘always’?” (418). In *The Yalta Game* Anna reassures herself in an act of self-delusion by insisting: “I will love you always” (35). Anna and Gurov, hoping against hope, long for a better future in passivity: “Yes, a miraculous solution would be offered to us. And that release would make our happiness so complete and so opulent and ... forever” (35). Little wonder, that a playwright having his cultural roots in Gaelic, a language he ironically describes to have “a syntax opulent with tomorrows” (*Translations*, 418) would be irresistibly drawn to this short story, a Chekhovian treatment of lives focusing on an unattainable tomorrow.

The same theme of living one's life based on fiction re-emerges in Friel's latest and most radical Chekhov adaptation, *Afterplay* (2002). Unlike most critics, who consider it an original sketch, I treat this one-act play as a culmination of Friel's several decades-long involvement with Chekhov, where adaptation is taken to the extremes. In the play Friel creates a curiously inter-textual world, very much in a post-modern fashion, whereby two Chekhov characters (from the two major plays Friel adapted first) are revived, given an afterlife "approximately twenty years after their previous fictional lives ended" (Friel, "Introduction" to *Afterplay* 69). "The impulse towards intertextuality, and the narrative and architectural bricolage that can result from that impulse, is regarded by many as a central tenet of postmodernism" (Sanders 17). Friel's *Afterplay* can be seen as an exercise in bricolage: "the purposeful reassembly of fragments to form a new whole, which [...] is an active element in many postmodernist texts" (Sanders 4). In the play, Andrey from *Three Sisters* meets Sonya from *Uncle Vanya*. And where else should they meet than in the much-longed-for Moscow. Andrey as a young man in *Uncle Vanya* craved to be in "any bigger Moscow restaurant" where "you don't feel you're alone" (46). Instead, however, Friel ironically puts him in a run-down Moscow café, where Andrey feeds his companion with a series of great fictions about his life, only to be served in turn with some examples of "little fiction" (98) by Sonya. *Afterplay* is an apparently non-dramatic play in the sense that memory and imagination, seeping through the two characters' private conversation, take over the role of dramatic action.

Friel's older Sonya, (like many other Chekhov and Friel characters) accepts suffering as a way to a happier future, she says she "staggers on within an environment of love of sorts" (99). As in *Uncle Vanya*, hers is the closing speech in which, after revealing her desperate financial and emotional situation, she turns

towards a better future saying that “when I summon that necessary fortitude, [...] then my life will begin to cohere again, and I’ll live without regrets and I’ll treasure whatever is offered to me, however occasional, however elusive” (99). Her last speech seems to shed a ray of hope that she will perhaps achieve a state when instead of self-delusion and self-contempt she will face up to the realities, as advised in *Uncle Vanya* by doctor Astrov: “face up to what *is*” (73) and echoed by Elena, who warns that we should “be reconciled to what we have” (34). However, in the context of the twenty fictional years that have passed since that advice, her use of the conditional about the future may signal that she is still trapped in an inactive longing for a better future, which ironically disqualifies her apparently optimistic final words.

Friel’s long involvement with Chekhov’s works is crowned by this one-act play in which Chekhov, the first begetter of the characters, is paid a subtle homage by the “godparent” figure of the adaptor. There are glimpses of Chekhov’s biography in the figure of Astrov, and Sonya in her enthusiastic talk on Chekhov/Astrov may function as a mouthpiece for Friel: “Three times he has gone to Sakhalin Island to look after the convict prisoners there during a typhus epidemic. [...] I don’t think he believes in God but he believes in human perfectibility. He sometimes uses the word holy. I think maybe he is a holy man himself” (95).

Three Plays After and the Shift in Friel’s Career

Friel’s decision to rework the “small offerings” of Chekhov, with a focus on intimate relationship and erotic passion between man and woman, until then not central in his works, indicates a certain shift in his career, which can be explained by tracing his ideological development. This shift from public to private projects appears to

illustrate what Scott Boltwood recognises as Friel's complete disillusionment with and alienation from both the politics of the Republic and Northern Ireland. Boltwood in his book *Brian Friel, Ireland and the North*, intends to "chart the long arc of Friel's ideological evolution: from his paradoxical combination of alienation from and enthusiasm for Irish nationalism in the 1960s, through his sceptical interrogation of the state in the 1970s and 1980s, to his ultimate disillusionment with Ireland in the largest sense in the 1990s and early 2000s" (5). The critic points out that in this third stage in his career, Friel produces one act plays that are all adaptations of Russian plays with the exception of *Performances* (2003), which is also set in a foreign country, this time Czechoslovakia. There is one important shared aspect of this series of late plays, namely, that they are "the only plays in Friel's more than forty years of playwriting to be set outside Ireland" (Boltwood 9) before finally turning back to Ireland, if not to his former strategy, in *The Home Place* (2005). However, it is not the foreign setting itself that indicates a change: in his first two translations, the Russian setting was domesticated and functioned as a proxy for Ireland, while in the later one-act plays this is not the case. There are no allusions to either Russian or Irish social contexts any more. This de-contextualised and de-historicised nature of the plays' setting is, as Boltwood argues, symptomatic of Friel's retreat from Ireland due to his ideological disillusionment with his homeland, and as such, "mark[s] a rupture in Friel's career" (Boltwood 9). Boltwood sums up that

these incidental pieces merit consideration because they signal a type of artistic redirection for Friel, not only does he textualize his avoidance of Ireland as a dramatic setting, but *The Yalta Game* and

The Bear share a focus on sexualised romance that [...] has heretofore been absent from Friel's drama. (199)

Friel's three recent adaptations of Chekhov, *The Yalta Game*, *The Bear* and *Afterplay*, share this conspicuous new feature of lacking references to the historical reality of the action. In the case of *The Bear* and *The Yalta Game* it is not so noticeable due to the very private nature of their subject matter. However, the omission is far more pronounced in *Afterplay*, set in Moscow, around twenty years after the original play's action, which would entail the context of the political turmoil of 1920s Russia, especially the effects of the Russian Revolution. For the complete elimination of the historical background to the play's action, Friel has received criticism: Fintan O'Toole, for instance, regrets an "absence of historical reality" ("Two Plays After" 14). Boltwood, however, argues convincingly when he says that Friel's strategy of "historical erasure," or in other words, his forcing "pertinent issues of history and nationality from the narratives" (201), is a result not merely of an oversight, or "Friel's attempt to elude issues of nationalism" (197), but his general retreat from Ireland in his drama.

Thus, the rewriting strategy applied in the three later Chekhovian plays differs significantly from the one that characterised *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*. The cultural-political project of the re-appropriation of foreign classics manifest in his strategy of thorough domestication via Hibernicisation gives way to a strategy of adapting the plays to a neutral setting, which results in the adaptor distancing them from large-scale social issues and focus on private ones instead. Although the techniques Friel used to update the play's language and characterisation to enhance comicality and sexual tension all constitute a subtle form of acculturation, the effect is

not measurable with the whole-scale domestication of his earlier Chekhov plays, which reflected on the particular politics of his translations.

“Cultures make various demands on translations” Lefevere and Basnett observe (“Proust’s” 7) and indeed, the Irish social milieu in the last two decades of the twentieth century seemed to generate, and to be appreciative of, the type of acculturating translations that have as their underlying agenda a resistance to the dominance of Standard English in order to further cultural and intellectual decolonisation by re-appropriating Chekhov after he had been appropriated and canonised by the British, and re-position his works within the Irish theatrical canon in Irish English. The intensive revisiting of Chekhov and other seminal European writers was perceived by the playwrights themselves as a necessary appropriation of these dramatists, and as an integral part of their own contribution to the development of modern Irish theatrical writing. As I argue along with Joseph Long, however, this phase of postcolonial re-appropriation seems to “have now run its course” Long, (“Diction”175). It is not only McGuinness’ and Murphy’s differing translation strategies and McGuinness’ own remark about recent versions being a mark of new confidence in Irish theatre that support this view. Brian Friel’s changed approach in adapting Chekhov (as in the shift from the “cultural” to the “personal project”) is also a demonstration of this changing process. After contributing to intellectual decolonisation in his *Three Sisters* and after expressing disillusionment with the current political situation and crying out for peace in *Uncle Vanya*, Friel turned to reworking apparently minor works by Chekhov where the emphasis is more on private concerns. Eventually, moving into the extremely private sphere of exploring emotions and the imagination, he has gone to the extreme end of adaptation and intertextuality in *Afterplay*. Thus, in his later Chekhov adaptations he carries out an

appropriation of Chekhov to enrich his own literary fantasy land. While giving the Chekhov works an ingeniously free treatment and incorporating them into his own oeuvre, Friel succeeds in staying alert to the spirit of the original. The achievement is a powerful interaction and an exciting dialogue between the works and worlds of the late Russian master and the contemporary Irish playwright.

The move away from this re-appropriating agenda towards re-presenting Chekhov by allowing his foreignness enter the target text is noticeable in Tom Murphy's version of *The Cherry Orchard* and McGuinness's version of *Uncle Vanya*. This change in translation strategy indicates a change in the cultural context for creating translations/adaptations of classics. It seems that once the desired cultural assertion is achieved (partly via acculturating translations and adaptations that justify the legitimacy of Irish English as a language as the medium for modern classics), subsequent translations and versions display less of the acculturating impulse and more willingness to show Chekhov as a Russian, foreign author. In these later versions/translations the Irish audience is allowed to discover the similarities between the two cultures, but not at the expense of the plays' Russianness.

Conclusion

Theatre in Ireland has always been political, ever since the Irish Literary Renaissance's endeavour to create national drama and theatre of distinct Irish character. As Shaun Richards observes, in Ireland "drama in its late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century manifestation sought to define and determine the basis of Irish claims for political independence from Britain" ("Plays" 1). The translations and adaptations of Chekhov created in the last two decades of the twentieth century are also political in that they do not merely update the language and relevance of the plays, but also, through their adaptation and translation techniques they use the Russian plays as analogies for Irish realities in order to reflect on the pressing issues of those realities. They represent a contribution to the final phase of establishing cultural independence from Britain and the legacy of its domination. Kilory's *The Seagull* and Friel's first two Chekhov plays function as resistant translations in the context of the ongoing process of cultural decolonisation, in other words, they do not only comment on the social, political scene but also endeavour to effect some change.

However, in the most recent adaptations a pattern of change in motivation and rewriting technique can be detected, which reflects a change in the measure of political urgency underlying the plays. This shift appears to stem from the important changes Ireland has undergone since the mid-1990s. The country's unprecedented and spectacular economic growth since then earned it the epithet "Celtic Tiger" and proved to be a watershed in the country's history. The economic boom resulted in the Republic's totally new position in the world market as one of the most active and successful players in the global economy, rather than a country on the periphery. This has led to profound changes taking place in Irish society. While culture, economy and

society under the exceptionally radical transformations of Celtic Tiger Ireland have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention in terms of the preconditions and roots of the economic success and also in terms of the impact of economic growth on society, the most recent drama, as some critics argue, seem to fail to interrogate global Ireland in a profound way.

Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin in their introduction to *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy* argue that the Celtic Tiger defines itself against a set of cultural representations associated with the past. One of them is the nostalgia for “Romantic Ireland,” another is “the disillusioned social realism associated with the age of De Valera” characterised by relentless pessimism, and finally, the last set of representations has to do with the Northern conflict, against which the new, post-national narratives of global Ireland react with “total disregard” (Kirby et al. 10-11). The result in culture is that “the eagerness to dispense with- or disavow- the most deeply-rooted conflicts in Irish society, whether to do with the North, sexuality or religion, has led to the search for new post-national narratives in which films, novels or plays are divested of any recognisable Irish traits” (Kirby et al.12).

Distancing itself from current issues of global Ireland, or at least avoiding their deep analysis, is what appears to characterise contemporary drama too. Shaun Richards in a 2007 article that surveys numerous recent plays written by the younger generation of Irish writers concludes that contemporary theatre dramatises Ireland’s engagement with globalisation in a way that does not yield a meaningful, critical interrogation of actualities. He observes that the expression of the discontents of modernity that are apparent in plays from the 60s onwards through the 80s, (in the plays, for instance, of Friel and Murphy), has not given way to a new mode of

engagement with the current circumstances. What can be seen on the Irish stage is the presentation of globalism as “an essentially unanalysed negative, a destructive off-stage presence which is acknowledged as emergent but which is of less interest than the residual which it is displacing” (Richards, “To me” 6). In spite of the changed circumstances, Ireland still tends to be portrayed as a victim, although the external force of subordination is now the global economy instead of the colonial power. There is a new genre of the “(dire) state-of-the-nation play”, which “stages Ireland riddled with a sense of malaise, of violence and excessive consumption” as people are being forced into an aspirational culture where everything needs to be about surface, about style.” The condition of global Ireland, as portrayed in drama “is always negative, the characters’ relation to it one of complaint, but analysis and ameliorative action are not simply absent but unevoked” (Richards 9).

Geraldine Moane’s description of Celtic Tiger Irish society as one where due to maintaining the psychological patterns across time “the only models, scripts or discourses available are those of domination or subordination” (112) suggests an explanation for recent plays representing global Ireland in negative terms, and even as a victim. This is the received paradigm and until liberation is achieved from that Manichean world view of domination and subordination, there is small chance for new vision and new frames of critique.

Richards sees the image of bleak uniformity as a consensus in much Celtic Tiger drama: “What these plays dramatise is an Ireland which, while globalised in terms of references and economy, has lost all meaningful cultural and moral coordinates,” therefore, “what these plays suggest is that despite the acquisition of prosperity the country now orbits around a void” (11). The critic argues that “Irish drama has yet to establish a new role outside of the comfort zone of postcolonial

criticism and soft-centred Celtic Tiger critique and engage with the position it occupies in a state which now has the power to ‘translate’ – its own as well as other subjects – rather than being always ‘translated’ ” (“To me” 12).

Richards’ ideas seem to have relevance to the actual translations produced by Irish playwrights since around 2000. If there is indeed a void, or at least a transitory phase, in contemporary Irish drama where the old postcolonial context and its issues are not relevant anymore, but a new type of artistic engagement with the new realities of Ireland as a global actor and beneficiary, which is at the same time vulnerable to the external forces of global capitalism, has not been found yet, then perhaps the abundance of translations and adaptations might be taken as symptom of the times. If rewriting foreign plays can be made part of the critique of the Zeitgeist, it can just as effectively signal a tendency to avoid engagement with Irish concerns. Rewriting foreign plays as opposed to creating original ones can also be a way of withdrawing from current issues, a reluctance to enter into a deep, critical engagement with them. The Chekhov adaptations or retranslations of the late 1990s and early 2000s, although marked by a new confidence and consequently a lack of the need to assert the right to “Irish” the plays, do not display either a postcolonial critique or engagement with Irish realities in terms of adaptation technique or dramatic concern, which implies that such interrogation still has to be waited for.⁷

Friel’s Chekhov rewritings illustrate this definite shift from engagement with public issues to a distancing of Ireland from his stage and focusing on more private ones. In his first two translations of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*, similarly to Kilroy’s adaptation of *The Seagull*, rewriting was one means of reflecting on and trying to affect the contemporary situation. In recent times, Friel’s adaptations, as well as sporadic original plays, show a lack of such engagement with public issues. In

Friel's most recent body of work, the creation of full-length original plays is outweighed by an insistence on producing adaptations of Chekhov (and most recently Ibsen), but significantly, with no trace of an intention to establish analogies that would provide some reflection on contemporary Irish realities. *The Home Place* (2005) appears to be an exception or counter example, as with this play the writer returns to the Irish themes, but ones pertaining to the past rather than to the present. Also, as Boltwood argues, *The Home Place* "marks for Friel a break rather than a return to his previous strategy" (204), for the play is the only one in the writer's oeuvre that portrays the Protestant Ascendancy. The later Russian plays withdraw from public issues altogether in both the adaptation technique and their dramatic concerns. They seem to be an expression of Friel's distancing himself from the current situation, or from analysing the conditions of Ireland as a globalised country in the midst of radical change.

McGuinness' *Uncle Vanya* and Tom Murphy's recent retranslation of *The Cherry Orchard*, although superficially could be associated with the established role of Chekhov to provide an analysis of the domestic through the foreign, show very little intention to provide this analogy. In contrast, there seems to be a more conscious tendency to bring forward the Russianness of the plays and the world they portray, and leave the audience to discover any potential Russian-Irish analogies unassisted. These two plays are characterised in terms of their translation technique by openness to foreign voices and by an intention to engage in a more immediate dialogue with a foreign literature, which might be considered to be an impact of their post-nationalist, globalised context. However, in their dramatic concerns they too hark back to personalised themes like searching for home, or the stagnation of people's lives,

without deploying the plays as effective vehicles for the expression of contemporary experience.

NOTES

¹ Friel's *Uncle Vanya* was produced by San Mendes at the Donmar Warehouse, London, in 2002 and met with mixed reception from critics, while Afterplay at the Gielgud Theatre in the same year proved more successful.

² Whenever I transliterate Russian words I use the ALA-LC transliteration system for Slavic alphabets published by the American Library Association & Library of Congress in 1997.

³ Elisaveta Fen's translations tended to preserve these features: she uses Andriusha, Liuba, Yermolai Aleksyeevich, etc., which in themselves of course do not prevent her from anglicising the play by other means.

⁴ If not otherwise indicated, all subsequent translations are that of the author of the present dissertation.

⁵ My translations of the Russian original texts of Chekhov's plays are based on Chekhov's works in the internet library Интернет-библиотека Алексея Комарова, hence the lack of reference to page numbers.

⁶ What he says with regard to the language of his play, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985), shows that McGuinness does not shy away from posing "linguistic threats to an audience" (Long, "Frank McGuinness" 302): he says he was deliberately setting out to upset an audience by making "the English language sound, particularly to English people, something foreign..." (Long, "Frank McGuinness" 302).

⁷ The fact that there were hardly any new Irish plays featuring in the programme of the 2008 Dublin Theatre Festival is probably symptomatic too. It is populated with international productions most of which are adaptations of some kind.

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